

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

STARBLAST



ALSO:

SHERLOCK
DEADPOOL
THE WITCH
DOCTOR WHO
GODS OF EGYPT
THE DIVERGENT SERIES: ALLEGIANT

AND MORE!

MOVIES • TV • GAMING • AUDIO • COMICS • BOOKS

ISSUE
422

STARBLAST
PUBLISHING

9 780955 114176



MARCH 2016
Printed in the UK
£4.99



THE AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT



THREE UNIQUE SLICES OF THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE
THE WITCH WHO CAME FROM THE SEA, MALATESTA'S CARNIVAL OF BLOOD AND THE PREMONITION

OUT FEBRUARY 22ND

WWW.AMERICANHORRORPROJECT.COM



[f /ArrowVideo](#)

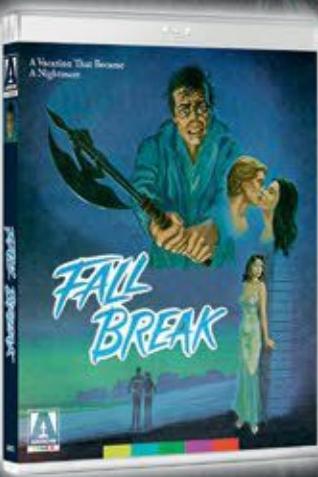
[@ArrowFilmsVideo](#)

[/ArrowVideoUK](#)

[ArrowVideo](#)

THE TERROR CONTINUES WITH...

THE MUTILATOR



DIRECTOR-APPROVED DUAL FORMAT EDITION
OUT NOW

ORDER NOW AND EXPLORE MORE AT
WWW.ARROWFILMS.CO.UK

CONTENTS

12



58



70



FEATURES

WORLD'S FINEST

12

The clash of the DC titans is almost here - we preview BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE.

MEET THE ANTIHEROES

18

Find out all you need to know about those comic book characters who straddle the line between hero and villain.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS - SUPERHEROIC PETS AND COMPANIONS

22

The weird and wonderful beasts that have somehow managed to become superpowered sidekicks in the funny books.

KRYPTONITE: THE GREEN GREEN GLOW OF HOME

26

The STARBURST guide to the MAN OF STEEL's Achilles heel.

ONE CHOICE CAN TRANSFORM YOU

42

The second film in THE DIVERGENT SERIES is here. What can we expect from ALLEGIANT?

TRUST IN PAIN

46

We look back on the classic TAKASHI MIIKE nightmare AUDITION.

OF GODS AND MONSTERS

58

Pop on your sandals, grab your foil and prepare to battle with the GODS OF EGYPT.

THE MULTI-LAYERED STORY

70

We get in on the bottom floor of BEN WHEATLEY's adaptation of J. G. BALLARD's controversial HIGH-RISE, starring TOM HIDDLESTON and LUKE EVANS.

LIFE'S A WITCH

62

Satanic goats and unknown evil prevail in what could be the horror movie of the year - THE WITCH.

62



42



THINGS TO COME 8

BLUE BOX SECTION

OUTSIDE THE BOX 30

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO 32

NO JOB FOR A HERO 34

REVIEWS 36

GIRL FROM PLANET X 40

HORROR OBSCURA 49

INDEPENDENTS DAY 65

CINEMA 73

DVD & BLU-RAY 78

AUDIO 86

BOOKS 94

COMICS 102

ANIME 110

COSPLAY 111

GAMES 114

MERCHANDISE 124

TV ZONE 126

IT'S ONLY A MOVIE 129

REGULARS

46



CONTENTS

STARBURST

MARCH 2016

ISSUE
422

EDITORIAL

Editor

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Editor

MARTIN UNSWORTH
martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com

Honorary Editor-in-Chief

DEZ SKINN

Online Editor

ANDREW POLLARD
andrew.pollard@starburstmagazine.com

Webmaster

JIM BOON

jim@starburstmagazine.com

REVIEWS EDITOR

JACK BOTTOMLEY

Sequential Art Editor

ED FORTUNE

ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

Audio Drama Editor

TONY JONES

anton.jones@starburstmagazine.com

Editorial Assistant

KIERON MOORE

ART

Collectors' Edition Cover Artist

MARK REIHL
markreihill.com

Art Director

JORDAN "MIKE" ROYCE
jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Art Director

SHAUNA ASKEW
shauna.askew@starburstmagazine.com

Assistant Designer

JON ROBERTS

PRESS

Press Liaison

PHIL PERRY

phil.perry@starburstmagazine.com

PLEASE SEND ALL PRESS RELEASES TO:
press@starburstmagazine.com

Please send all review materials to:
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO BOX 4508,
MANCHESTER, M61 0CY

THE GREATEST WRITING TEAM IN THE UNIVERSE

Head Writer

PAUL MOUNT

paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com

Lead Writers

LIVVY BOOTE, JACK BOTTOMLEY, DOMINIC CUTHBERT, KATE FATHERS, ED FORTUNE, JOEL HARLEY, CHRIS JACKSON, CHRISTIAN JONES, TONY JONES, JOHN KNOTT, ANDREW MARSHALL, IAIN MCNALLY, KIERON MOORE, STUART MULRAIN, ROBIN PIERCE, ANDREW POLLARD, LEE PRICE, IAIN ROBERTSON, CALLUM SHEPHERD, JR SOUTHALL, NICK SPACEK, ADAM STARKEY, JOHN TOWNSEND, PETE TURNER, MARTIN UNSWORTH

Contributors

TOM ACTON, JONATHAN ANDERSON, SOPHIE ATHERTON, JENNIE BAILEY, VANESSA BERBEN, PHIL BERESFORD, SIMON BESSON, NICK BLACKSHAW, FORD MADDOX BROWN, LARA BROWN, COURNEY BUTTON, MARTYN CONTERIO, TONY COWIN, ALISTER DAVISON, SPLEENY DOTSON, JD GILLAM, ANIMAL JOHNS, ROBERT KEELING, ROBERT MARTIN, ROD MCCANCE, NEIL MCNALLY, FRED MCNAMARA, HAYDEN MEARS, CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, ANDREW MUSK, DOC CHARLIE OUGHTON, THOMAS HICKMAN, PETE HIGGINSON, WARRICK HORSLY, RYAN POLLARD, PAUL RISKER, LAURA ROBINSON, GRANT KEMPSTER, WHITNEY SCOTT-BAIN, DANIEL SEDDON, JON TOWLSON, LEONA TURFORD, RICHARD THOMAS, SCOTT VARNHAM, NIGEL WATSON, SAMANTHA WARD, MATT WELLS, DAVID WHALLEY, IAN WHITE, THOMAS WINWARD, ZACK THE ZOMBABY

AND TETSUO... THE FEARLESS REPTILE GUARDIAN OF STARBURST HQ!

ADVERTISING

To advertise with STARBURST contact:
advertising@starburstmagazine.com

Check out our website for details on how to get our
DIGITAL EDITION

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Make sure you don't miss an issue of STARBURST by taking advantage of our great subscription offers at www.starburstmagazine.com

For all subscription enquiries please contact:
starburst@inter-media.co.uk - 01737420190

Starburst Magazine is published monthly by Starburst Publishing Ltd. Nothing in this magazine can be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher. Whilst every effort is made to ensure all information in the magazine is correct, prices and details may be subject to change. All photographic material is copyright to the relevant owner and appears with their kind permission. Visuals are used in a reviews context and no copyright infringement is intended. All rights reserved.

Starburst is printed in the UK by BUXTON PRESS LIMITED
Palace Road, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6AE

Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 2nd Floor, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU.
Tel: 020 3148 5300 - Fax: 020 3148 8105 - Web: marketforce.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 422!

Any long term readers of STARBURST may be aware of my extremely negative opinion of Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel*. Having been a long term appreciator of his movies (even the maligned *Sucker Punch*), it was even more unfortunate that I found it to be so objectionable. In the infamous June 2013 Episode 3.1 of The STARBURST Radio Podcast, myself and my friend and then Co-Editor Kris Heys went at it hammer and tongue over this flick. Kris found plenty to like, whilst I was horrified at what I found to be a far from super characterisation. Whilst it performed ok at the box office, it did turn out to be just as divisive with audiences, and prompted a rare morphing of the planned sequel into an entirely different movie altogether - *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

So, have I again featured Henry Cavill as Superman on the cover just to sell magazines? Well, obviously I have. However, I am quite taken with this rendition of Batman played as an older character by Ben Affleck, and maybe this movie will win over those of us that did not drink the *Man of Steel* Kool-Aid. Certainly this magazine has had a long lasting history of covering all of the D.C. Comics pantheon, and this will certainly be a cinematic first. The face-off between the Dark Knight, and a slightly darker incarnation of Superman. It also promises to be the founding point of the ongoing D.C. Cinematic Universe, so it is unmissable stuff for all of us, and I have again high expectations going in. Let's just hope that you will all be spared another meltdown, and that I actually enjoy this one!

Also this issue we take a look at the upcoming (and awesome) *The Seasoning House* prior to its screening on Horror Channel. We also shoehorn in previews of *Gods of Egypt* and *The Witch*, whilst also having a look at *High-Rise*, the upcoming movie from Ben Wheatley.

The Divergent Series: *Allegiant* (man, these titles confound my poor brain) also gets the once over, together with a look back at the traumatic Takashi Miike film *Audition*. All your regular goodies are also all present and correct, and you find out in *It's Only a Movie* whether 2016 has gotten off to the same flying start as 2015 did...



Until next issue,
Keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
EDITOR



Buy directly from STARBURSTMAGAZINE.COM and choose from our Collectors' Edition cover or Newsstand cover.

FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY
or email: letters@starburstmagazine.com

STAR

LIFE IS LIKE A BOX OF DOCS...

Is it any wonder people are turning the channel over from BBC One on Saturday evenings? Like the rest of you (that's the real fans of the show), I tune in hoping for something better, only to be let down! How can a series look so fantastic and be so dire. Remember the wonderful John Nathan-Turner? He started well, but stayed too long and guess what? Cancellation! Well, Steven Moffat started well... need I say more?

DOCTOR WHO is a fine

looking chocolate box at the moment, with a ribbon wrapped around. But when you open that box to taste the chocolate within, they're sh*t!

DOCTOR WHO is at its best when it treats kids as adults and not as kids; and adults - like adults! That's good DOCTOR WHO.

You can bet I will be buying STARBURST from now on, and you do speak for the majority of DOCTOR WHO fans, whether they like what's being said or not!

Peter Dobson, Leeds

LETTER

THE GOLDEN TRUTH

Whilst I enjoyed the X-FILES coverage in Issue 420, it seems that your writer Rod McCance thinks that the first 'golden age' of television was the 1990s featuring the original X-FILES and BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER. Whilst this was an interesting period, it is generally accepted that the first 'golden age' was the 1960s and when writers refer to the current period as being a new 'golden age' they are consisting what we have now to what there was in the 1950s, not the 1990s.

Peter Hurren, via EMAIL

No one is trying to down play the importance of 1950s television, but the production values, and wider use of story arcs in the '90s was a big step up, but it would never have been if it wasn't for standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before them, as you mentioned, in the golden era.

BLU-REY

Hello! Thanks for publishing my letter in STARBURST #421. I forgot to mention that my top 5 is in no particular order!

At the time of this writing, I've seen STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS 8 times; another 3 times since my last letter. By the time you read this, I'll probably have seen it another 2 or 3 times. My record is 11 times (in 11 weeks) when

LUCY came out in 2014. It was flawed, yes, but I love it. I'm thinking about breaking my record with SW:TFA.

But there's something about getting very familiar with a good movie. You notice things you didn't notice before. And likable and attractive actresses usually help too: when the movie comes out on Blu-ray they should rename it Blu-rey.

Btw: Google "Kylo Ren & Stimpy". You'll laugh your heads off. The fan art awakens!

May the Fonz be with you!

Darth Kapreles, via EMAIL

Wow, that's a lot of viewings!
Maybe you should have capped it at 7, as seen as it was episode VII, and you could go see the next one 8 times.

I wonder if any of our readers have topped this, and seen STAR WARS: THE FORECE AWAKENS more times in the cinema than 8? - Let us know!

GRAND MOFF DEPARTIN'

YES!!!! Saturday morning, January 23rd 2016. My phone has just played its little tune and I've been awoken by a text telling me that Steven Moffat is stepping down from his pivotal role as DOCTOR WHO 'showrunner'. Apart from a win on the Euro, this is surely the best news to wake up to on a Saturday morning (Which reminds me, I'd better check my ticket!). It almost makes

up for losing Lemmy and Bowie. Almost.

The question is; after the lamentable last series, did he jump or was he pushed? Obviously, I'd love to think that my letter in STARBURST #419 had something to do with it, but realistically, I know this won't be the case. Mind you, maybe the campaign of common sense led by Paul Mount and this august journal did manage to chip away at the great Moff's conscience and/or support? Obviously, reading DOCTOR WHO magazine, one would think that the last series was the best ever. What little I saw of it, I'd have to disagree!

Anyway, goodbye Moffat and good riddance. At least I now know that I can start watching the series again in 2018. Seems a long way away, though, and heaven knows what further damage Moff can do to it before he goes. Oh well, best to look on the bright side. Speaking of which, it's stopped raining and the sun has finally emerged from behind the clouds. A great day indeed!!!

Yours very happily,
Chris Drake, via EMAIL

Just because he's stepping down as showrunner doesn't mean he won't cast himself as the Doctor before he leaves!

I'LL MISS MOFFAT
I just wanted to say how much I have enjoyed the latest series of DOCTOR WHO, including the recent Christmas special. For my tastes, it's been the finest series since its return in 2005. I think there has been excellent writing, direction, acting, and production across the series as a whole.

There were a few moments

I didn't like (the tank scene, Rufus Hound's highwayman, for example) but these didn't spoil the series, which on the whole I thoroughly enjoyed, as did my fifteen-year-old daughter who watched along with me. Admittedly, my seventy-year-old mum, like Paul Mount, struggled with following some of the stories, though I'm not sure she blames Steven Moffat. She's something of a SHERLOCK fan, after all.

One of the reasons I've written is because there is an awful lot of negativity towards current WHO in your mag. Angry, unhappy fans are always going to be more vocal than contented, happy fans, and I wanted to add to the positive for once. I'll be sad to see Moffat go but I'm excited for the future.

I would also like to say how glad I am that Paul Mount has decided to take a break from DOCTOR WHO until Steven Moffat has left. It's become increasingly tiring seeing his bile-filled rants against the current showrunner filling up your pages. They aren't even entertaining bile-filled rants. His current lengthy tirades make the moany letters he used to write to DOCTOR WHO Magazine thirty years ago look like works of Wildean genius.

M. R. John, via EMAIL

It's true that on the whole, the viewers who are indifferent or just about satisfied keep quiet, and the people who are most vocal are the ones who are feeling the extremes, but that's negative AND positive. It just so happens that the latter appear to be in the minority, otherwise they would surely be provoked to speak up and rave about the show, just as the displeased do.



THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



DC

With **Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice** splashed generously throughout this very issue, Zack Snyder's film has brought in a last-minute new addition in the form of **The Walking Dead's** Lauren Cohan. The actress, known to many as simply Maggie, will be playing Martha Wayne in **BvS**... because what's a cinematic Batman appearance without a flashback to that night in Crime Alley, right? She'll be appearing opposite fellow **Walking Dead** star Jeffrey Dean Morgan's Thomas Wayne. Morgan, of course, is set to appear as uber-villain Negan towards the end of **TWD**'s sixth season. Also, ahead of **Batman V Superman**'s impending release, long-standing Bat-fan Kevin Smith has described Ben Affleck's turn as the World's Greatest Detective as the greatest we've ever seen based on the footage that he's been privy too. Here's hoping good ol' Kev Smith is right when the film gets released next month.

Briefly sticking with the Caped Crusader, there's again been fuel added to the fire when it comes to the topic of Affleck possibly directing a Batman movie in the future. This time, it centres around the actor-turned-director himself, with Affleck saying how working with Zack Snyder on **Batman V Superman** inspired him to want to do something similar. Could that inspiration lead to him helming **The Batman**, the film rumoured to be being planned for 2018? Crazier things have happened.

With Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman set to début alongside Affleck's Dark Knight in **BvS**, the Amazon's solo movie has landed a new addition in the shape of Connie Nielsen. The **Gladiator** actress will be playing Hippolyta, the mother of Gadot's Diana and the Queen of the Amazons. She joins a cast that currently includes

Gadot, Chris Pine, Robin Wright, David Thewlis, Danny Huston, Said Taghmaoui, Elena Anaya, Lucy Davis and Ewan Bremner. To be directed by Patty Jenkins, **Wonder Woman** is planned for a June 2017 release.

Whilst both Gadot's Wonder Woman and Affleck's Batman will be key components in Zack Snyder's two-part **Justice League**, so too will Jason Momoa's Aquaman. The King of Atlantis will actually have a brief appearance in **BvS**, before then turning his attention to the JL movies and his own solo outing. But it's the woman at Momoa's side who has our attention this month, as Amber Heard is in talks to star opposite the **Game of Thrones** star and play Mera, the no-nonsense, strong-willed wife of Aquaman. If she does indeed land the role, the **All the Boys Love Mandy Lane**, **The Ward**, and **The Danish Girl** actor is expected to be introduced as Mera in November 2017's **Justice League: Part One**, before then playing a pivotal role in James Wan's **Aquaman** in July 2018.

Now while it's been confirmed that Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, and Aquaman will all have parts to play in Snyder's **Justice League** movies, there was a notable Green Lantern absence... until now. DC's Geoff Johns has finally confirmed that there will indeed be a Lantern presence when the Justice League starts to take shape. Whether that's Hal Jordan, John Stewart, Guy Gardner, A.N. Other or multiple Lanterns, we'll have to wait and see. Regardless of whether it's more than one GL or not as part of the Justice League, we'll be getting plenty of the Emerald Knights when **Green Lantern Corps.** arrives in 2020.

In the biggest TV news of the month and arguably the biggest DC news full stop, it's been confirmed that, after much hope and speculation, Grant Gustin's Flash will be appearing in the Melissa Benoist-starring **Supergirl**. The Scarlet Speedster will appear in an upcoming episode that's scheduled to air in March over in the US, although no details are known of the outing's plot at this stage. But this now opens up plenty of avenues for **Supergirl** and **The Flash**, not to mention **Arrow** and DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**, two shows that take place in the same world as the Sultan of Speed's capers. Could Stephen Amell's Green Arrow pop up in National City at some point in the future? Sure. And with Superman being a known presence in **Supergirl**, how could that play into the action of The CW's shared universe shows? And on that front, **Smallville's** Tom Welling has recently talked about how he wouldn't be averse to returning as the Man of Steel should **Supergirl** come calling. Having played Clark Kent and a Superman-in-waiting for ten seasons of **Smallville**, admirers were dying to see Welling don the iconic cape and tights, with some even calling for him to star in his own Superman movie. Seeing the actor finally playing a mature, experienced, powerful Superman would be something that fans would love to see, but we'll have to wait to find out if anything comes of that. After all, it was only last year that there were rumours of Welling-as-Supes to turn up in **The Flash**, but nothing ever came of it. Well, yet. Who knows what lies ahead?

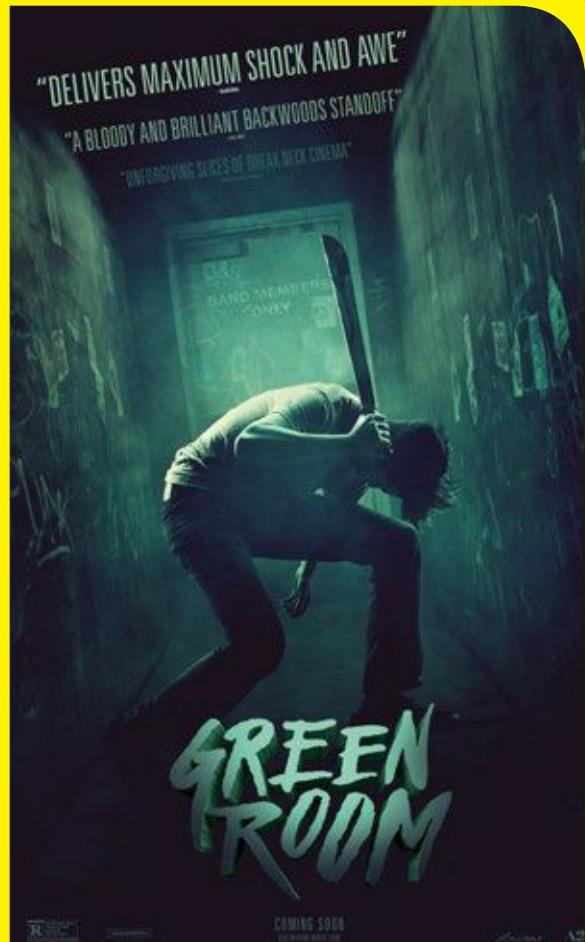
In further **Supergirl**, and technically **Smallville**, news, CBS' **Maid of Might** show has brought in yet another former Kryptonian this month. Laura Vandervoort, who actually played Supergirl in The CW's **Smallville** years ago, is joining **Supergirl** in the role of Indigo, a character straight from the comic books and who will be yet another Fort Rozz escapee out to cause trouble for the Girl of Steel. Vandervoort joins former Superman Dean Cain and one-time Supergirl Helen Slater as being Super-alumni who have gone on to appear in **Supergirl**. Additionally, **The Young and the Restless'** Jeff Branson has signed on to play Master Jailer, the man tasked with overseeing things at Fort Rozz and someone who is now out to bring all escapees to justice, and **Tales of Halloween's** Daniel

DiMaggio has landed the gig of *Supergirl*'s young Kal-El, with the future Man of Steel being featured during a dream-like episode entitled *For the Girl Who Has Everything*, itself a play on the Superman comic tale *For the Man Who Has Everything*. Although *Supergirl* has already returned over in the US, the show's mid-season premiere is set to air on April 1st in the UK.

Returning momentarily to Grant Gustin's Barry Allen, and in some more awesome, awesome news, Kevin Smith has been confirmed to be directing an upcoming episode of *The Flash*. Kev Smith and the Scarlet Speedster? Does it really get any better than that? No, it doesn't. The 'loud and proud' comic book fanboy has a back catalogue of films dotted with references to the funny books, plus he's also written tales for names such as Daredevil, Spider-Man, Batman, and Green Arrow. No details are known about what episode Smith will be helming, but we do know that it will air Stateside in May. And in some final *Flash* news, *Days of Our Lives'* Allison Paige is joining the show as Eliza Harmon, better known as the speedster Trajectory. Unfortunately for the comic book character, she only actually featured for a matter of weeks before her untimely death due to complications from Lex Luthor's Everyman Project. We'll have to wait and see what Trajectory's TV future has in store for her when she makes her first appearance later this year. Ooh, and before we leave the Sultan of Speed behind, expect to see Robbie Amell's Ronnie Raymond back in a future Earth-2-set episode as the villainous Deathstorm alongside Killer Frost. Despite having already returned in the US, *The Flash* won't be back on UK screens until March 1st.

For those who've had a chance to check out DC's *Legends of Tomorrow*, you'll agree that the show is all kinds of fun. Sure, you have to leave your brain at the door with some of the time travel issues, but it's a massively enjoyable comic book effort that isn't afraid to camp it up a little. Now whilst the show's titular heroes have so far gone back in time in their attempts to stop immortal rogue Vandal Savage, an upcoming episode will see them heading into the future and meeting an older Oliver Queen. With Stephen Amell confirmed to be playing the old Ollie, the roughly 60-year-old Green Arrow will be sans an arm, much to the delight of fans of *The Dark Knight Returns*. And if that's not enough, the Emerald Archer will also be joined by his son, Connor Hawke, someone who goes on to take on the Green Arrow mantle himself in the comic book world. Again, the DC television world knows exactly what to give its audience to make them happy! But there's also plenty more ahead for the Legends – Rip Hunter's team of The Atom, White Canary, Firestorm, Hawkgirl, Hawkman, Captain Cold, and Heat Wave – as *Texas Rising*'s Johnathon Schaech has been brought in to play comic book fave Jonah Hex in an episode of *Legends* that will take place in the Old West. Additionally, *Firefly* and *Stargate Atlantis*' Jewel Staite is another to have joined the show, with her role being that of Rachel Turner, somebody described as a tech genius who exists in the future and whose well-intentioned technology ends up in the hands of Vandal Savage. Interestingly, this original character is believed to be the descendant of an already-existing CW/DC character, with early suggestions being that she may be related to either Ray Palmer/The Atom or Felicity Smoak. DC's *Legends of Tomorrow* has now been confirmed for a March 3rd UK start.

Much like *Legends of Tomorrow* has expanded the array of DC properties on the small screen, there's also some news this month of some upcoming shows. First up, NBC has officially ordered a pilot for *Powerless*, a comedy show set in the DC world. The premise for the series centres on the, err, powerless folk who live in the DC Universe, and it's been described as "a workplace comedy set at one of the worst insurance companies in America" and will focus on the company that has to deal with the issues and problems caused by having various heroes and villains causing chaos and carnage (here's looking at you, Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel*). The *Powerless* pilot will be penned and executive produced by A to Z's Ben Queen, and it's believed that no major DC characters will actually appear in the show. While *Powerless* is now seemingly a go, one series that is a 'maybe' is one based on the Legion of Super-Heroes. DC Entertainment's Geoff Johns has recently revealed that there will be a hint of the Legion in one of the current DC-based shows, and he's hoping that something more will eventually come of this. For those not familiar with the Legion of Super-Heroes, they're a team of 30th-



After the fantastic *Blue Ruin* blew everyone away last year, we've been waiting with bated breath for writer/director Jeremy Saulnier to unleash his next opus upon us. Well there's not long now, as *Green Room* promises to be just as explosive as festival reports are to be believed. The plot has a rock band trapped in their dressing room as a group of white supremacists cause mayhem at their gig. Patrick Stewart plays against type as the leader of the fascist group. The movie opens in the UK on May 13th.

century heroes – usually consisting of Cosmic Boy, Saturn Girl and Lightning Lad – who were inspired to fight the good fight thanks to the legendary tales of Superman. For *Smallville* fans, you'll remember they popped up in an episode accompanied by Chameleon Boy and Brainiac 5. The most likely destination for any tease of the Legion seems to be DC's *Legends of Tomorrow* or possibly even *Supergirl*, so keep your eyes peeled. And while *Powerless* is a go, and the Legion are maybes, things don't look good for the long-mooted live-action *Titans* show. TNT have been developing a Teen Titans series for a while now, with the planned line-up to be Dick Grayson (who would start as Robin before transitioning to Nightwing), a wheelchair-bound Barbara Gordon, Raven, Starfire, and the Hank Hall and Dawn Granger versions of Hawk and Dove. With Oscar winner Akiva Goldsman having penned the first episode's script, it's now sadly been revealed by TNT's Kevin Reilly that the network has decided not to move forward on the project. So, *Titans* is dead in the water before it even got going. Well, unless another network decides to take on a punt on the show.

In some final, final, final DC news, FOX's *Gotham* will see a return for Jada Pinkett Smith's Fish Mooney later this year. Fish was last seen falling to her apparent death at the hands of Oswald Cobblepot, so expect The Penguin to be in her sights upon her return to Gotham City. AP



MARVEL

While he'll be one of the few MCU characters who won't be appearing in *Captain America: Civil War*, details are now circulating on just how The Hulk will figure into the story of *Thor: Ragnarok*. That film will be featuring Cate Blanchett in a villainous role, and it's again being reported that she will be playing Hela, the Goddess of Death. With Hela and Loki combining to banish Chris Hemsworth's Thor from Asgard, the Son of Odin ends up on a nearby planet full of warriors in a gladiatorial setting. Having dispatched everyone put in his path, the Thunder God is then put up against the most dangerous of the planet's combatants. Yes, you guessed it, that's where Thor will be confronted by the Green Goliath himself, The Hulk. For years now, there have been rumblings of a possible cinematic adaptation of the fan favourite *Planet Hulk* comic arc, and this seems to be a way of Marvel Studios utilising elements of that particular yarn. Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner was last seen on a journey into self-imposed isolation at the end of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and won't be seen again until Taika Waititi's *Ragnarok* rolls around in October 2017.

Arriving nearly a year before the God of Thunder's next outing will be Scott Derrickson's *Doctor Strange*, a film that has this month found a new addition in the form of *The Martian* and *Marco Polo*'s Benedict Wong. The actor will be playing the conveniently-named Wong, who is someone often described as the Sorcerer Supreme's 'manservant' in the comic book realm. Basically, he's Strange's equivalent to Bruce Wayne's Alfred. To be headlined by Benedict Cumberbatch as the Master of the Mystic Arts, *Doctor Strange* is currently set to hit the big screen on November 4th.

Following both *Doctor Strange* and *Thor: Ragnarok* is *Black Panther*. Chadwick Boseman's T'Challa will be debuting in this year's *Captain America: Civil War* before eventually getting his own 2018 movie. Having been in talks for the past few months, *Creed*'s Ryan Coogler is now officially on board to direct the first of Panther's solo outings, which should see the Prince-cum-King of Wakanda going up against Andy Serkis' Ulysses Klaw. *Black Panther* is presently penciled in for a February 16th, 2018 release.

Flipping over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, Hugh Jackman is edging closer to his final outing as the iconic Wolverine. With James Mangold's follow-up to *The Wolverine* confirmed to be the last time that Jackman will be donning the famed adamantium

claws, the Australian actor has revealed that he's now received the final script for the film, with shooting expected to start over the next few months... as highlighted by the fact that Hugh has recently been spotted with very Wolverine-esque facial hair. At present, the currently-titled *Wolverine 3* is set to arrive in cinemas in March 2017.

Elsewhere in Fox's X-Men-centric realm, the Channing Tatum-starring *Gambit* is confirmed to finally start shooting in March of this year. The initial plan was for the film to go into production back in October ahead of a planned October 2016 release. That was all delayed when director Rupert Wyatt departed the feature. With *Edge of Tomorrow*'s Doug Liman now on board to direct, *Gambit* is currently without a confirmed release date, although it's expected that Tatum's charismatic Remy LeBeau likely won't arrive on the big screen until early 2017.

Whilst the X-world is to be further explored in cinematic terms, plans are starting to move ahead for everyone's favourite mutants where the small screen is concerned. FOX's *Hellfire*, an upcoming show set to focus on the villainous millionaire-run Hellfire Club, has had a creative change. The network has moved the original creative team of Evan Katz, Manny Coto, Patrick McKay and JD Payne over to their *24* revival, *24: Legacy*. A new creative team is set to be announced for the series shortly ahead of the show's planned debut next year. As well as *Hellfire*, another X-based show is on the way over at FX in the shape of *Legion*. This past month has seen *The Guest*'s Dan Stevens, *Parks and Recreations*' Aubrey Plaza, and *Fargo* pair Rachel Keller and Jean Smart added to the show. Stevens has landed the lead role of David Haller, a schizophrenic who comes to realise that the voices in his head may be truer than he was led to believe. To comic book fans, they'll recognise David as the son of one Charles Xavier. As for Keller, she's nabbed the female lead of Syd, a mutant whose powers centre on physical touch. For Plaza, she's landed the role of Lenny, a friend of David's who remains ever-optimistic even though she lives a life of drink and drugs. And then there's Smart's character of Melanie, a nurturing-yet-demanding therapist who likes to consider unconventional methods when it comes to her work. The pilot for *Legion* has been written by *Fargo*'s Noah Hawley, who also serves as the executive producer alongside Lauren Shuler Donner, Bryan Singer, Simon Kinberg, Jeph Loeb, Jim Chory, and John Cameron.

Taking things down to the dirty streets of Hell's Kitchen and the realm of Marvel's Netflix-exclusive shows, this month has seen confirmation of a second season for the Krysten Ritter-starring *Jessica Jones*. That's believed to be something that will arrive on the on-demand service next year. Before that, though, is a second season for Charlie Cox's *Daredevil*. The Guardian Devil has been confirmed to return to Netflix on March 18th. Joining DD in that will be Jon Bernthal's Frank Castle, aka The Punisher. Where The Punisher is concerned, it's believed that Netflix is close to giving the all-clear for Frank to get his own series in the future, so impressed have executives been with Bernthal's turn as the iconic Castle. And whilst nothing is official from Marvel or Netflix, Rachael Taylor has openly talked about how she'd be eager for her *Jessica Jones* character of Trish Walker, who in the comic books becomes the heroine Hellcat, to get her own show at some point.

Finally, upcoming *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* spin-off show *Marvel's Most Wanted* has brought in *Malcolm X*'s Delroy Lindo as Dominic Fortune. Fortune is a comic book character best described as a roguish adventurer who eventually becomes a gun-for-hire. *Most Wanted* will be headlined by Adrianne Palicki's Mockingbird and Nick Blood's Lance Hunter when it arrives on screens later this year. AP

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

Recovered from the wonders of *The Force Awakens* yet? Well, with *Star Wars Episode VII* now in the bag, all eyes are on what's happening next in a galaxy far, far away. Sure, there's *Episode VIII* on the horizon, but as announced in January, we have to wait even longer for that as it's been pushed back from its original May 26th, 2017 release date to the more lucrative December 15th. But before that, we've got Gareth Edwards' *Rogue One*. On that front, there's a whole host of more details surfaced on what we can expect to see in the first of the three *Star Wars* anthology movies (going under the awfully *A Star Wars Story* title).

Whilst we've seen a cast photo from *Rogue One* and know loose plot details – a group of Rebels look to grab the plans to the Death

Star (sounds familiar, right?) – some interesting news on further plot points for the film have emerged. Now, whilst this new info is far from confirmed by anyone at Disney or Lucasfilm, be warned that there are some potential spoilers ahead.

We knew that Darth Vader was to be included in Gareth Edwards' movie, but now it's being reported that Vader's role will be much larger than initially believed. Whether Vader leads the battle against the Rebels or if he is just seen giving orders from afar, we'll have to wait and see, but the Sith Lord's presence is certainly going to be a major one.

Additionally, fighting the Rebels will be what's being affectionately referred to as Deathtroopers. These are essentially Stormtroopers decked out in black, and presumably, given their ominous title, they're a lot more accurate and lethal than their white-suited brethren.

It's also being reported that *Rogue One* will feature a scene-stealing droid (because what's a *Star Wars* movie without a scene-stealing droid?) that was built for Imperial purposes but hijacked and reprogrammed by the Rebels. It's believed that this new droid will be dark grey or black in colour, with it being a two-legged creation that's believed to look a lot different to your standard C-3PO-type droid. There's even speculation that this droid could be the long-rumoured mo-capping gig that Alan Tudyk is supposedly on board for.

In some final, small news, the name Cashen/Kashyn/Kashon is to be present in *Rogue One*, too. No details on whether that is a person, a planet, an artefact, a droid, or whatever just yet, though.

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story is currently set for a December 16th release. | AP

Former STARBURST Editor Pens Film

Kris Heys, the beloved former Assistant Editor of this very magazine, has written the screenplay for a short film that is set to go into production soon. *Ends Meat* is directed by the award-winning Helen Curran and follows a man who is driven to do some horrendous things, with suitably nasty consequences. It's to be shot around Manchester City Centre in March, with some preliminary setups already in the can, which can be seen in the atmospheric teaser trailer. Helen, who graduated her BA at Manchester Film School in 2014, has already scored massive success with her short *Delicacy*, which has screened around the world and picked up numerous awards at several festivals. *Ends Meat* sees her return to a more macabre style of film, which she is looking forward to; "I love genre film as a filmmaker and as a film fan, and *Ends Meat* brings me back to a not too dissimilar place as *Delicacy*" she told us.

The short is currently raising funds through Indiegogo, and the campaign finishes at the beginning of March. A full interview with Helen can be found on the STARBURST website.

AND FINALLY...

Guillermo del Toro revealed on Twitter that he will be working on a movie of short tales based on Alvin Schwarz's beloved *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*. We can only assume this will be a portmanteau film, and although no other details are available at the moment, del Toro has reassured fans of the book that illustrator Stephen Gammell's haunting imagery will be 'preeminent in the film'.

+++

Further to the *Alien: Covenant* saga, it now seems Noomi Rapace's Dr Elizabeth Shaw will not be returning. The character was the only human to survive *Prometheus* and was originally expected to appear with Michael Fassbender's David. The film's due to be released on October 6th.

+++

A film version of the hugely popular West End show *Ghost Stories* is set to begin shooting in September. Martin Freeman has already signed up to star and co-writer Andy Nyman will reprise his stage role, as well as taking the director's seat. *The League of Gentlemen*'s Jeremy Dyson is the show's other co-writer, and he is expected to sit alongside Nyman behind the camera too.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

FEBRUARY 22ND - TALES FROM THE CRYPT (1972)

For some, this is the best of the Amicus portmanteau films, and while that's up for debate, it's certainly one to recommend. The usual all-star cast, this time including Joan Collins (terrorised by a killer Santa!), Patrick Magee, Ian Hendry, and Ralph Richardson (who's actually buried in the East side of Highgate Cemetery, the location used for the atmospheric opening shots). Peter Cushing provides a heartbreakingly wonderful portrayal of a man driven to suicide by his nasty, snobbish neighbours.

+++

FEBRUARY 27TH - NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1990)

The 1968 original is an undisputed classic, but this remake has more than enough merits to make it of interest. Namely the script by original director George A. Romero and the fact it's directed by FX supremo Tom Savini. While essentially a gorier re-tread, the heavyweight cast - including Tony Todd, Patricia Tallman and Bill Moseley - make sure it's compelling viewing.

+++

MARCH 4TH - THE CANAL (2014)

A powerful supernatural mystery in which Rupert Evans becomes obsessed with a vintage murder that might tie-in with his own wife's brutal death. Creepy and atmospheric, it's reminiscent of classic haunting films.

+++

MARCH 5TH - GRABBERS (2012)

Now, here's a riotously fun monster movie starring likeable Richard Coyle (best known for Steven Moffatt's comedy series *Coupling*) as a boozy Irish Garda dealing with his enthusiastic new partner (Ruth Bradley) just as their sleepy island is besieged by bloodsucking sea creatures. Hilarious, gory, and memorable, it's full of whimsical Irish charm.

+++

MARCH 6TH - THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY (1981)

Goremeister Lucio Fulci's mesmerising former video nasty is always worth a watch for fans of cult cinema. With his trademark random plotting and awkward dubbing, Fulci's films are an acquired taste, but certainly reward the effort.

+++

MARCH 7TH - THE DEVIL'S RAIN (1975)

A gloriously underrated Satanic classic directed by Robert Fuest (*The Abominable Dr Phibes*) and starring William Shatner, Tom Skerritt and a pre-fame John Travolta. You won't believe your eyes when you see evil Ernest Borgnine transform into a goat, and almost the entire cast literally melt away. Keep your eyes peeled for genuine Church of Satan leader Anton LaVey, who wrote the sinister ceremonies.

+++

Tom Baker has a great run of Classic *Doctor Who* serials showcased, with *City of Death*, *Logopolis*, *The Androids of Tam*, *The Ark in Space*, *The Keeper of Traken*, *The Android Invasion*, and *The Pirate Planet* all being screened. The latter was even written by Douglas Adams (*The HitchHiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). If you prefer your TV a little less timey-wimey, and are excited about the impending appearance of The Goddess of Truth in *Batman V Superman*, there's the second season of *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman*, starting from Episode One. There's also a chance to see Rob Lowe in the adaptation of Stephen King's *The Strand*, showing over four consecutive days.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.



WORLD'S FINEST

BY ANDREW POLLARD

For years now, long-time comic book fans have waited for the big screen collision of two of pop culture's most iconic names: Batman and Superman. After many trials and tribulations, finally these two legends are set for a cinematic battle of epic proportions when Zack Snyder's **BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE** arrives next month. With that said, let's look ahead and see what we can expect from one of this year's biggest movies...





PREVIEW

WELCOME TO DEVELOPMENT HELL

Whilst we're finally set to see the Dark Knight and the Man of Steel butt heads, this isn't the first time that the two have met. As well as the various tear-ups/team-ups from the comic book world, be it as a duo or as part of the Justice League, the two also crossed paths in the fantastic animated **World's Finest** movie from 1997, as well as several more modern animated efforts. But the bigger story here is how we so nearly saw a big screen battle between these two behemoths as far back as 2001. In August of '01 it was announced that *The Perfect Storm*'s Wolfgang Petersen was to helm an effort known as **World's Finest: Batman v Superman**. At that time, the names in the frame to play the Caped Crusader were Colin Farrell and Christian Bale, whilst Jude Law and Josh Hartnett were being eyed for the Last Son of



Krypton. You have to remember, of course, that this was a cinematic landscape still scarred from **Batman & Robin**, with Joel Schumacher's **Batman Triumphant**, Darren Aronofsky's **Batman: Year One** and Boaz Yakin's **Batman Beyond** all failing to get off the ground in a world fearful of big budget superhero efforts. Petersen's **World's Finest** would stagger through development hell for 18 months, seeing changes in tone of the script (writers were brought in to specifically add humour to what was an extremely dark screenplay), arguments raging between the director and the studio, and some bizarre suggestions brought up for the two lead roles (Petersen at one point changed things up and suggested John Travolta as Superman against a returning George Clooney as Batman). And so the film was canned and the notion of these two heroes colliding was put on the shelf... Until now.

To give **Dawn of Justice** some further context, this is a film that even now wasn't initially meant to be happening just yet. With the early buzz around Zack Snyder's **Man of Steel** being hugely positive and hopeful, all eyes at Warner Brothers were on **Man of Steel 2** first and foremost. Then **Man of Steel** took a solid-but-not-spectacular \$668 million at the box office, which was well shy of the \$1 billion that Warners were hoping for. To save face, they couldn't pull their already-announced **Man of Steel** sequel, and thus the ever-reliable Dark Knight was brought into the fold in order to help out his fellow hero, with Ben Affleck finally nabbing the role of an older, grizzled take on the World's Greatest Detective (ahead of Josh Brolin) as **Man of Steel 2** was transitioned into **Batman v Superman**. And not just Batman was called to the rescue, for a whole host of other names have also been shoehorned into the film (we'll get to them shortly).

SON OF KRYPTON VS. BAT OF GOTHAM

Plot-wise, **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** actually makes a lot of sense. Simply put, Affleck's Bruce Wayne saw the carnage caused by Henry Cavill's Superman during **Man of Steel** and took umbrage to this untapped, unknown and uncontrollable alien menace. One of the biggest criticisms coming out of **Man of Steel** (well, bar the totally un-Superman-like neck snapping finale) was the destruction and damage that the film's titular hero caused to Metropolis and innocent civilians. Having Batman irked by the events of Snyder's 2013 movie is a logical step, and it also serves to give the audience an 'in' to this new version of the Caped Crusader. By this point in the game, Affleck's Wayne has been donning the cape and cowl for many a year, with him having seen many horrors, losses (including a Robin), and not prepared to take any chances when it comes to new threats... including the recently-surfaced Kal-El. With the Dark Knight initially looking to take down Superman, it's not long before the pair put aside their dueling ideologies as they realise that there's a far greater threat looming in the shadows.

Depending on your viewpoint, you could possibly see either Batman or Superman as a potential villain, but the big rogue on show here is Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor. Taken aback by Metropolis'

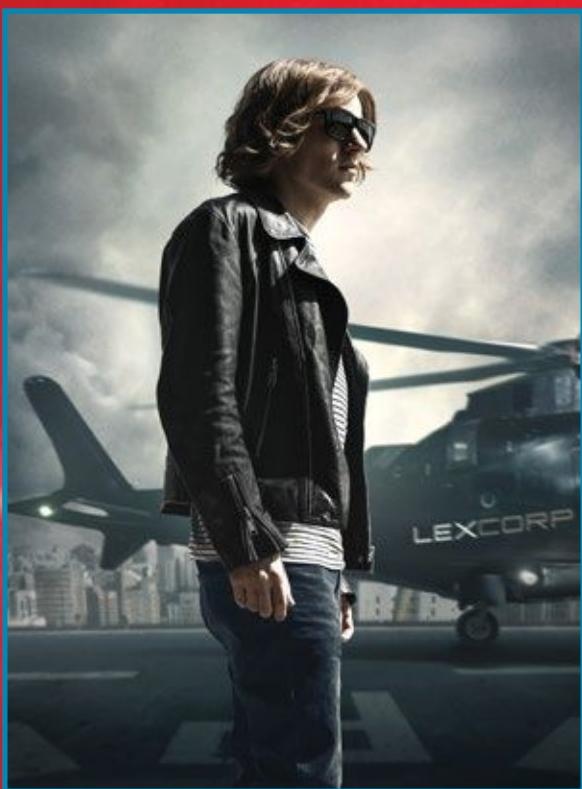
apparent new god and also embroiled in business matters between LexCorp and Wayne Enterprises, Lex is somebody destined to clash with both the World's Greatest Detective and the Big Blue Boy Scout. But he's not alone, for – as spoiled by the recent spate of trailers and TV spots – Lex has managed to get hold of the corpse of Michael Shannon's General Zod in order to create Doomsday. To long-time DC fans, Doomsday is the uber-bastard of a creature that actually killed Superman in the famed **Death of Superman** comic book arc. Well, until it was really all later revealed that Supes had just been having a bit of a kip... but we'll leave that topic well alone. Doomsday is a villain of Kryptonian descent who was literally bred to kill any and all things that got in his way; the character essentially dies and continues life through cloning a whole host of times whilst remembering the deaths that he's suffered and using this anger and hate to provide ammunition against the skulls he needs to smash. In **Dawn of Justice**, however, it appears that Luthor has created Doomsday either by cloning or reanimating and mutating the fallen Zod. Also, expect to see Eisenberg's Lex, who will be depicted as a young, hip type running a super-cool Google-esque modern miracle of a company, to at some point don a battle suit similar to what has been seen in the comics over the decades. Fear not, though, for **Batman v Superman**'s titular duo have some back-up of their own at hand.

LEAGUE LEADERS

Ever since its inception, DC's Justice League has always been headed by the holy trifecta of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. As such, with the not-so-subtle **Dawn of Justice** subtitle for Zack Snyder's **Man of Steel** follow-up, it's no surprise to see the Amazonian joining the action here. The **Fast & Furious** franchise's Gal Gadot landed the gig of the DC Cinematic Universe's Wonder Woman, and you can expect her to turn up midway through **Batman v Superman** to provide a helping hand against Doomsday. Again, that's something that we've seen in the various trailers and TV spots that have been fired out over the last 6 months. And because things have to be kept all new and up to speed, the DCCU Wonder Woman will be based on The New 52 (is that even still relevant nowadays?) version of the character, meaning Diana will be a demigoddess and daughter of Zeus.

If having Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman involved wasn't enough, we'll also be treated to appearances from certain other future Justice League members. For starters, Ray Fisher will be appearing as Victor Stone, the pro athlete who suffers a horrific, life-changing accident that results in him becoming Teen Titan-cum-Justice Leaguer, Cyborg. His role here is set to be a small one and it remains to be seen whether we see any of the incident that leads to him becoming Cyborg. And then there's Aquaman, played by **Game of Thrones**' Jason Momoa, again someone confirmed for a small role in **Batman v Superman**, with his story possibly tying in to Viola Davis' Amanda Waller. The King of Atlantis' presence here is said to be extremely minimal, however, much like a certain Scarlet Speedster. With Ezra Miller on board as the DCCU's Flash, it's





believed that we'll be getting a super-brief cameo from Barry Allen during the film. In fact, it could even be that we literally just get to see a red blur.

EXPANDED ROSTER

Whilst the Justice-League-in-waiting unravels before our eyes, there are also plenty of other confirmed actors and characters who will be a part of *Dawn of Justice*, some of whom we have seen before and others who will be introduced. On the returning front, Amy Adams' Lois Lane, Harry Lennix's General Swanwick, Christina Wren's Major Ferris, Laurence Fishburne's Perry White, and Diane Lane's Martha Kent are all back following their introductions in *Man of Steel*. When it comes to new additions, the ever-popular Jeremy Irons is long-standing Bat butler Alfred, *The Wolverine*'s Tao Okamoto is Lex Luthor's bodyguard/personal assistant Mercy Graves, *Watchmen*'s Jeffrey Dean Morgan is Thomas Wayne, and *The Piano*'s Holly Hunter is playing a US Senator by the name of Finch. Where it gets more interesting are the unknown roles in place for *Monsters*' Scoot McNairy, *300: Rise of an Empire*'s Callan Mulvey and *Donnie Darko*'s Jena Malone. Mulvey's role is a relative mystery right now, although some reports suggest he could be playing either Metallo or KGBeast. With the other two mystery roles, rumours and speculation claim that McNairy could very well be Jimmy Olsen and that Malone could be Barbara Gordon. Then there's those stories that Dick Grayson may appear in some fashion. We already know that one Robin is dead thanks to The Joker – seemingly Jason Todd – but could it be that we get an appearance from former Robin Grayson as Nightwing? We certainly hope so, for Dick Grayson is one of the most beloved characters in the DC world. We definitely know that Grayson exists in Warner Brothers' DC Cinematic Universe, but it appears that he'll be name-dropped at best when *Batman v Superman* arrives on the big screen. For those die-hard Grayson fans out there, though, expect to see him playing a bigger role as the DCCU expands, and the same can also be said for the Red Hood, with plans in place to do with the Red Hood what the Marvel Cinematic Universe did with the Winter Soldier.

So that's pretty much all you need to know ahead of *Dawn of Justice*'s release, with the basic narrative being Batman hunts down Superman, then two transition from enemies to BFFs as Wonder Woman arrives on the scene to help them stop the greater threat of Doomsday and Lex Luthor. Oh, and expect to see cameos from certain other Justice League members. But in a nutshell, that's about it. Whether Warner Brothers and DC are trying to do too much too soon is the big question here. Clearly, they've seen the huge success that Marvel Studios and Disney have achieved with the plethora of characters that they've brought to the big screen, and now Warner and DC want a piece of that multi-hero pie. The thing is, Marvel and Disney slowly constructed their shared universe, introducing characters individually, developing multiple layers to them and making the audience care about them. Then when they *did* all come together, people gave a shit and had something that they were already invested in. With the DC Cinematic Universe, particularly *Batman v Superman* and *Suicide Squad*, it could be looked at that Warner Brothers are trying to rush their storytelling; to race to the endgame rather than take their time with the necessary foundations. It's a bold move, but it's a risky one. Here's hoping that *Dawn of Justice*, and *Suicide Squad* for that matter, wows audiences and leads to a cinematic battle for the ages between DC and Marvel properties. But to put that battle into place, we first have to see whether the cinematic battle of the ages between the Dark Knight and Man of Steel proves to be successful enough to bring some solidity and quality to the long-winded plans that lie ahead for the DCCU.



BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE hits UK cinemas on March 25th.



BIRMINGHAM COMICS FESTIVAL

EDGBASTON STADIUM, BIRMINGHAM, B5 7QU

APRIL 23RD - 2016



Meet Creators from 2000AD, The Beano, Marvel, DC and Image Including:

LEIGH GALLAGHER LUCA PIZZARI IAN KENNEDY MIKE COLLINS
HUNT EMERSON LAURA HOWELL JESSICA MARTIN RYAN BROWN
IAN EDGINGTON SONIA LEONG JIM ALEXANDER DAVID HINE
DAN ABNETT RON TINER LEW STRINGER ASIA ALFASI
DAVE WINDETT STAZ JOHNSON IAN RICHARDSON
RACHAEL SMITH and the top Indie Creators in Britain!

Get your
photo
taken in the
2005
Batmobile



STANDARD ENTRY
£10

ALSO FEATURING:
COMIC DEALERS!
PUBLISHERS!
COSPLAY GROUPS!
PROP DISPLAYS!
MOVIE SET EXHIBITIONS!
BODYPAINTERS!
MUCH, MUCH MORE!

Maria 10

VIP EARLY BIRD WITH GOODY BAG - £25, REGULAR EARLY BIRD - £15 (BOTH WITH 9AM ENTRY)
ADULTS - £10, CHILDREN - £7.50, UNDER 5 FREE (ALL WITH 10AM ENTRY)

Tickets from www.thecomicfestival.com

Characters are copyright © DC Comics Inc 2016



MEET THE ANTIHEROES

WORDS:
ANDREW POLLARD

In the world of comic books, the decades have seen fans magnetically drawn to a certain type of character: the antihero. The early years of the funny books saw readers championing the whiter-than-white heroes who drank their milk, rescued cats, kissed babies, and hugged grannies. That act started to get stale by the 1970s (some would even say things were starting to sour before then). Step forward: the antihero; a champion in their aims, but not necessarily in how they go about reaching them. With *BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE* arriving on the big screen shortly, and with the *DARK KNIGHT* himself a mightily complex character with multiple layers, now seems like the perfect time to highlight some of DC's most famous and beloved rough-around-the-edges good guys and their not-so-heroic methods and morals.

JASON TODD

Ah, where else better to start than with a man whose story will forever be tied to the Caped Crusader? Step forward, Jason Todd, the former Robin who was brutally beaten to death by The Joker before the Clown Prince of Crime blew him up just to be on the safe side. Make no mistake about it, Jason was dead. As dead as a dodo. As dead as the demand for Jimmy Savile-esque shell suits. As dead as a sequel to Josh Trank's *Fantastic Four*. As dead as... as dead as... you get the idea. In fact, so permanent was Jason's death, it was often referred to as one of the only three comic book deaths that actually really stuck – the others being Bucky Barnes and Uncle Ben. Of course, Bucky would eventually be brought back after a nearly 40-year absence and become The Winter Soldier. As for Jason, he was dead for 15 years before he returned from the dead under the Red Hood moniker; a play on the role his killer, The Joker, took on years prior. Todd arrived back in Gotham City and immediately went about killing no-good criminals

and drug pushers, going to extreme lengths to make his mark, such as multiple beheadings and explosions.

After getting the attention of Bruce Wayne and getting some major issues off his chest, Jason would still flirt between the right and wrong side of the law, going on to take on the mantles of Nightwing, Red Robin and even Batman himself briefly, as he struggled to find his place in the world. Regardless of what moniker he was going by, Jason Todd managed to become what all of the best antiheroes are: ridiculously badass and a no-nonsense ass-kicker that you find yourself pulling for regardless of the way he goes about his work. The mantra of Jason is largely deemed as inflicting a punishment that commits the crime carried out by somebody. It doesn't necessarily make for him being a great hero, but it sure makes for him being a fantastically riveting character whose resurrection actually feels purposeful, fresh and infinitely better than so many of the paint-by-numbers generic rebirths that we've seen from comic book characters over the years.



JOHN CONSTANTINE

A chain-smoking, sarcastic occult detective, John Constantine has been getting results by not necessarily doing the right things for years now. Débuting as a supporting character in a *Swamp Thing* story, the chopsy Scouser proved so popular that it didn't take long before he was given his own comic book series.

With his trademark trench coat, loose-fitting tie, cigarette and lighter, Constantine has proved to be somewhat of an enigma; and all whilst physically being based on the singer Sting. At times appearing to act only for his own benefit or bending all manner of rules to get the job done, Hellblazer would often be revealed to be working on a more ethical, well-meaning level than what was first believed. He may come across as a thoroughly miserable bastard for the most part, but Constantine's heart is mainly in the right place, even if he can barely muster a smile amongst the cigarette smoke and alcoholic beverages. Hell, even beating cancer didn't really lift JC's mood!



DEADSHOT

When it comes to antiheroes, there are largely two different types: those who have always been heroes that just operate through shady means. Then there are those who begin life as a villain before eventually softening just enough to be considered a little bit of a reluctant, roguish hero. Floyd Lawton most certainly fits into the latter category.

As Deadshot, Lawton has largely been seen as a Batman villain since debuting way back in 1950. A master marksman, he's seen as one of the very best assassins in the DC world. With his willingness to kill if the deal is right, Deadshot has also been a perfect fit when it comes to playing a vital role in the Suicide Squad over the years. It's only really over the last decade or so that this rogue has started to be portrayed as a little bit more of an antihero. Largely down to the fact that providing for his daughter has been highlighted as a key reason for him doing what he does. Also, his hatred of certain villains, particularly Captain Boomerang, and a penchant for doing the 'right thing' at times marks Deadshot as not necessarily as much of a flat-out villain as he used to be, and he definitely now flirts with the notion of being an antihero these days.



RORSCHACH

Known to his pals (if he actually has any) as Walter Joseph Kovacs, Rorschach is arguably the key character in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' much-revered *Watchmen*. In a series of twists, turns, betrayals and generally not very nice people, Rorschach is the main character that's used as an 'in' for the audience and is the only person of this ensemble piece that is ever really positioned as a true hero. Well, we say hero, but antihero is likely a more applicable term.

Much like The Punisher, Rorschach is somebody who looks to dispatch the bad guys by any means necessary. To him, there is never any middle-ground; everything is either black or white, good or bad, dead or alive. Additionally, when *Watchmen* begins, it's he who is the only 'hero' yet to give in and work under a government umbrella, and we all know that when you give in and work for 'the man', then that's akin to selling your soul to the devil in comic book land. What's most impressive about the Rorschach character and his ever-changing mask (its design varies based upon his mood) is how he is so loved amongst comic book fans despite how few appearances he's made. After all, you have to remember that he has only appeared in the *Watchmen* graphic novel, then later the *Before Watchmen* prequel and his own miniseries. To have such fandom based on that is impressive going by anyone's standards, be they hero, villain, or antihero.



CATWOMAN

Despite being one of Batman's most famous and iconic rogues since her first appearance in 1940, Selina Kyle's character underwent a little bit of a tweak during the late-'80s. Until then, Catwoman was pretty much a straightforward villain, albeit one who happened to have a little bit of a soft spot for Bruce Wayne and Batman. Regardless of who this kitten got all hot and bothered by, she was still a baddie, thinking nothing of murdering people as she went. Conveniently, this would eventually be retconned and classed as the actions of Earth-B's Catwoman. But, of course... Throughout the past few decades, Selina has always been a very 'grey' character. For instance, during Frank Miller's *Year One*, she was a dominatrix-turned-burglar who had been abused by her pimp and clearly had some issues. Then the '80s would also bring the reveal that Catwoman



had suffered a tortured childhood based around an alcoholic father and a mother who committed suicide. Heavy stuff, and stuff that certainly went some way to explaining that there was a lot more going on with Selina Kyle than merely being a master cat burglar. By the time the '90s and 2000s came along, Selina had already been given her own comic book series – a rarity for an apparent villain – and was by this point serving as more of a heroine as she assisted Batman and his supporting cast in fighting the good fight, with her particular skill set often coming in very useful to the Caped Crusader. Still, Selina couldn't and can't resist a good steal, and we often see her inner-torment on show as she deliberates between doing what's right and what is instinctual to her; with these things usually being two very different thoughts. As much as Selina may be pained to admit it, she has a heart of gold underneath her tough, street-raised exterior.



DEATHSTROKE

Slade Wilson, AKA the totally-badass-named Deathstroke the Terminator, is another entry on this list who spent the majority of his life as a villain before becoming a reluctant hero of sorts. Starting out as a Teen Titans rogue before going on to tangle with the likes of Batman, Green Arrow, and The Atom, Deathstroke just has an undeniable coolness about him. With a military background, an eyepatch, a mastery of every fighting style known to man, not to mention a penchant for mixing up his attacks using various swords and guns, Slade is a match for any hero he comes across. In fact, this is a man who has held his own against multiple Justice League members at a time over the years.

What makes Deathstroke an antihero is that he has been known to operate with a moral code, something that is much different from many other rogues and something that is even different to how Slade was depicted when he first debuted. Also having a family life to also contend with – which, in itself, has provided many a troubled moment for Wilson – Deathstroke is more than just your average villain. He may essentially be a gun for hire, but for Slade Wilson, there is a slither of morality in what he does. To fully highlight the nuances and complexity of this character, Manu Bennett's portrayal of Slade Wilson in *Arrow* is arguably the greatest live-action depiction of any DC-based villain to date. Sure, elements of Slade may have been changed up for the show, but the end result is something truly phenomenal and really encapsulates what is so riveting about this rogue-cum-antihero.

LOBO

Everybody loves a bounty hunter, right? There's just something infinitely cool about somebody who is paid a hefty wedge to carry out the dirty work of others. If you're being paid to do that stuff, it clearly means that you're good at what you do. And Lobo is certainly good at what he does.

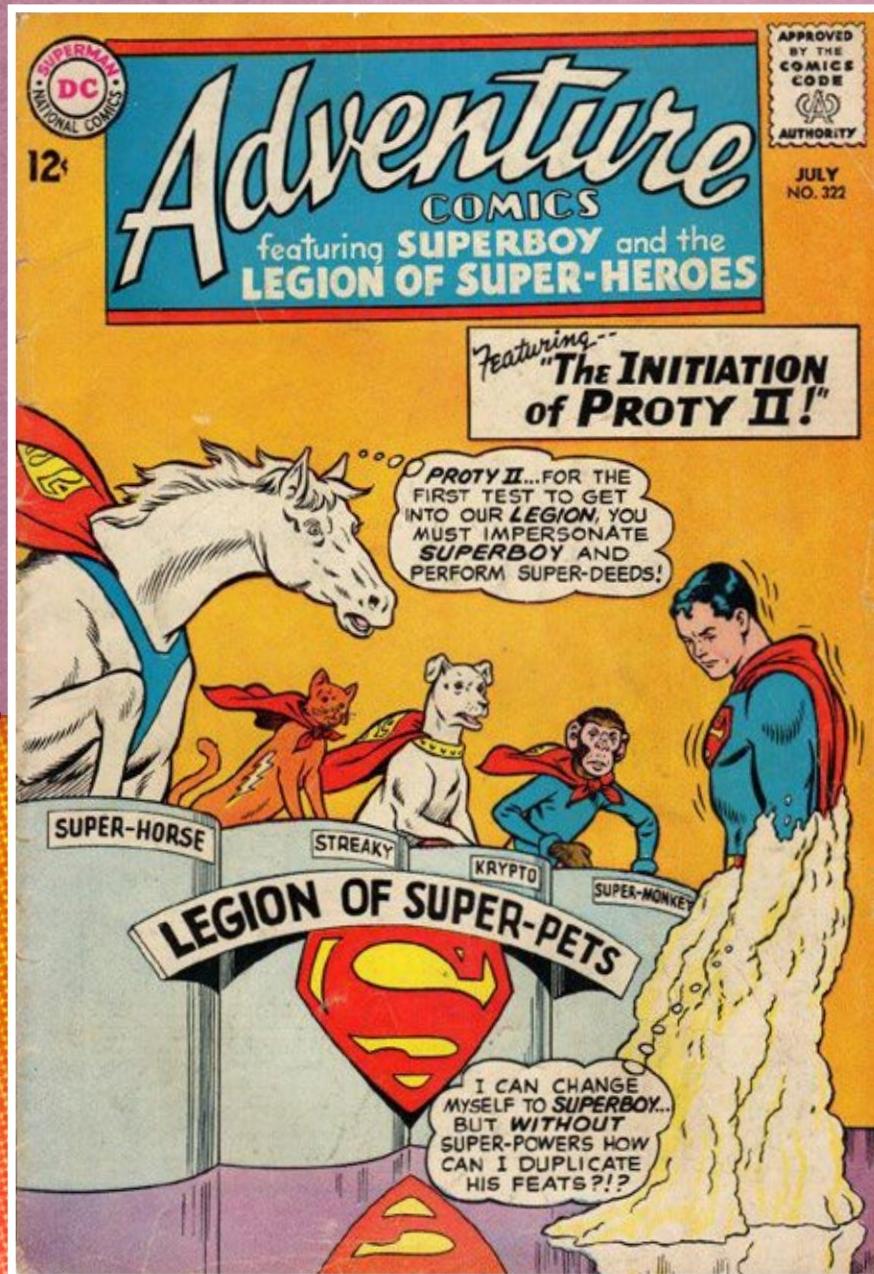
Despite several retcons over the years (can we please just forget about metrosexual Lobo now?), Lobo has always remained a near-unfathomably cool character. Straddling his famous Spacehog motorcycle, this mercenary thinks nothing of killing his friends, his foes or even tangling with somebody as powerful as Superman. Quite simply put, Lobo has long run out of fucks to give. That's likely down to the fact that this hard-living rock star of the galaxies is often deemed to be as powerful as Superman by certain writers, meaning he really is somebody who has no master. Considering Lobo was created as an almost tongue-in-cheek response to Marvel's success with Wolverine and, to a lesser extent, The Punisher, it's testament to his character that he became so popular so quickly, with many seeing him as the quintessential comic book antihero.



SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

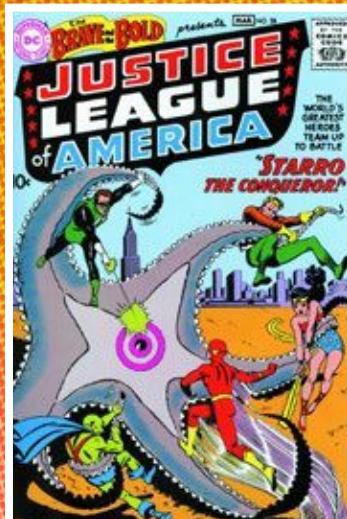
Superheroic pets and companions

by Robin Pierce



Every man needs a pet, be he Super, Bat, Aqua or.... well, jungle-based. And they often give us more than we expect. We delve into comic book history to learn more...

Despite the title, let's kick off with some animal companions who aren't exactly furry. Aquaman has had more than his fair share of non-human pals, the most obvious of which are the giant seahorses he rides. But how about the unsung hero Peter the Puffer Fish, who alerted Aquaman to a problem at sea which caused the Justice League of America to make their first comic appearance in *The Brave and The Bold* #28 to battle the menace of Starr, a giant starfish. There was also Porm – a dolphin that had earlier become a surrogate mother for Aquaman, and Topo – a trained octopus, who notably held a birthday party for the hero in issue 266 of *Adventure Comics* in 1959, where it was revealed that Aquaman had taught him to play simple





tunes like 'Happy Birthday' on every kind of musical instrument. In fact, the final panel shows Topo playing eight instruments at once.

Before we go to some of the better known animal characters, let's deal with an obscure superhero who débuted in Showcase #66, February 1967, *B'wana Beast – The Jungle Master*. Mike Maxwell crash landed on Mount Kilimanjaro, and after drinking some water in a strange and mysterious cavern that bestowed super strength on him, he befriended a gorilla named Djuba, who gave him a helmet that enabled Maxwell to control and communicate with animals as he tracked down a poacher in his guise of B'wana Beast during a mercifully short two-issue run.

Sadly, all this isn't as bizarre as DC's superhero pet line up could be. It's not even the tip of the iceberg.

During the fifties and sixties, Superman's mythos expanded dramatically; the character's popularity saw him

characterised as a child in *Superboy*, he gained a cousin in *Supergirl* – and a between them, they gathered a menagerie of faithful super-powered pets.

Krypto the Superdog remains the best known. Originally introduced in *Adventure Comics* #210 (March 1955) Krypto had been baby Kal-El's pet on Krypton and had been launched into space experimentally before Jor-El blasted his son to Earth as Krypton died. Krypto's ship went off course and didn't land on Earth until Superboy was a teen. Possessing all the super powers of his master, and disguised as the mild-mannered Kent family dog, Krypto would wear a red cape and the familiar 'S' logo as a tag on his collar as he fought crime alongside Superboy and later Superman.

Krypto became a regular favourite throughout the silver age – undeserving of his tragic demise in the ‘imaginary’ story penned by Alan Moore entitled *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* This was published just prior to the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* that radically changed the DC universe in the mid-eighties. During a siege in the Fortress of Solitude, Krypto

sacrifices himself to save his master by fatally attacking the Kryptonite Man. Krypto himself died howling in pain of kryptonite poisoning in a memorably stunning and harrowing scene.

Of course, there have been re-inventions and reboots of Krypto since then. You can't keep a good dog down.

However, cape wearing white dogs from other planets aren't quite as peculiar as Streaky, the super cat.

Though not Kryptonian by birth, Streaky accidentally happened across some artificial Kryptonite, called 'X-Kryptonite', that Supergirl had thrown away after a failed experiment to try and neutralise the green ore's effects on her and her cousin. Somehow, it actually GAVE the mighty moggle superpowers AND almost human intelligence. So, a cat that can fly, has heat vision, strength... and again a little red cape. Oh boy!

In the 30th century, according to an issue of *The Legion of Super-Heroes*, Streaky has a super powered descendant called (wait for it) Whizzy - who is also telepathic.

In Superboy #76 (1959), Beppo the Super-Monkey was introduced. It seems





that for all his mighty Kryptonian IQ, Jor-El somehow failed to notice that a monkey had clambered in to Kal-El's spaceship and was blasted to Earth with him. Okay, so Jor-El was probably distracted and preoccupied, but still – one would hope he'd notice a hairy little chimp in the small ship with his only child. Beppo, of course, developed super powers under the Earth's yellow sun, becoming the Monkey of Might. But the Simian of Steel was thankfully retconned out of existence in the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

But while Superman was basically running a zoo, it seemed only fair that the Dark Knight should also expand his 'family' in the fifties. Joining Batman and Robin alongside Alfred the butler in their fight against crime would be the original Batwoman and Bat-Girl (with a hyphen, unlike later versions). So they made quite the nuclear family, with the only missing element from fifties Americana being the family dog. Enter Ace the Bat-Hound in *Batman* #92 (June 1955).

Ace was a German Shepherd, owned by an engraver who had been abducted by a gang of counterfeiters.

Batman used the dog to locate its owner and, subsequently, the criminals. The engraver then wisely took a new less risky job which meant he couldn't care for Ace, so the dog was adopted by Bruce Wayne.

Thankfully, Ace never wore a bat cape, but he DID have a distinctive mark on his head which would make him easy to identify – so he wore a bat mask while fighting crime. There was a later Ace, in the early nineties, a guide dog originally belonging to a blind Native American, but he never had to wear a mask and sadly he disappeared during the earthquake that levelled Gotham in the *No Man's Land* story arc.

So – dogs, cats, apes, and sea-life. Can the DC writing team possibly get any quirkier than what we've already seen, taking into account that Krypto, Streaky, and Beppo joined the crime-fighting League of Super Pets?

Yes it can.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls – I give you Comet the Super-Horse, introduced in *Superboy* in 1962, then becoming a regular supporting character in the Supergirl continuity.

This is as twisted, bizarre, and downright strange a story as ever unfolded in a comic book, and is not for the faint-hearted.

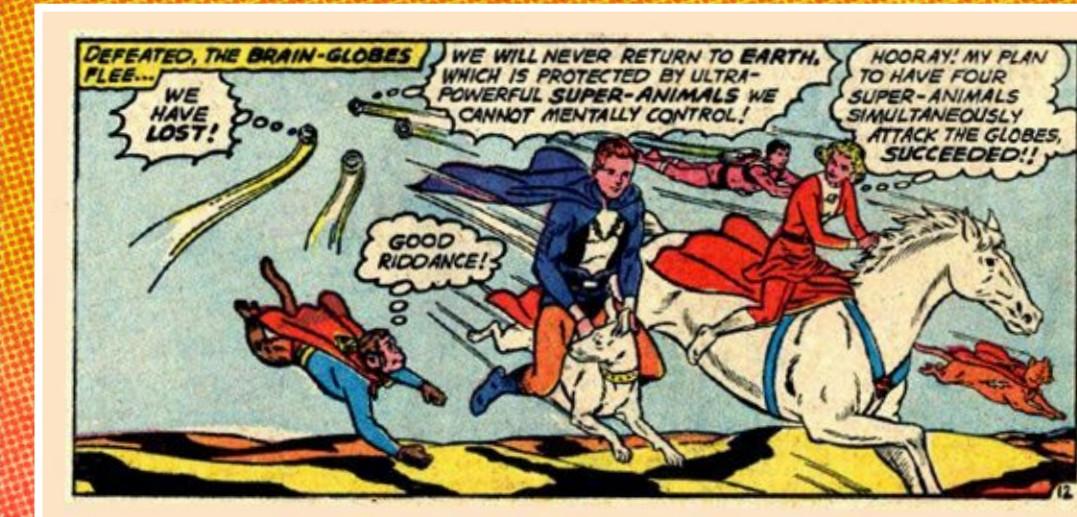
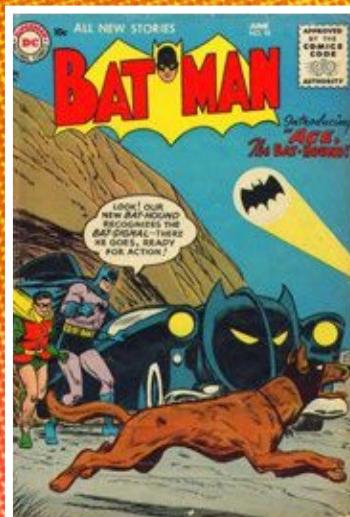
Comet was originally a centaur in Ancient Greece, where he was named Biron. The witch Circe tried to turn him fully human in gratitude for Biron foiling a sorcerer's plan to poison her water. The sorcerer, however, caused Circe to turn him fully horse, with super powers that included immortality. Although, as he's not from Krypton, he's not susceptible to Kryptonite.

Eventually, he met Supergirl and became her pet.

So far, so good. Here comes the downright weird. Supergirl took him to the planet Zerox, where a spell was cast that would turn him temporarily human, effective only while a comet passed through the solar system, and he became her boyfriend (we told you it was a strange story).

At one point, while in his human form, he even had a relationship with Lois Lane, but later reverted to being a horse.

Up, up and away, indeed.



BEAST WITHIN



AFTER NIGHTS OF SLEEPWALKING,
A TROUBLED TEEN STRAPS
A CAMERA TO HIMSELF AND
DISCOVERS A SINISTER TRUTH



OUT ON DVD 14TH MARCH
PRE-ORDER NOW

matchbox films

amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.



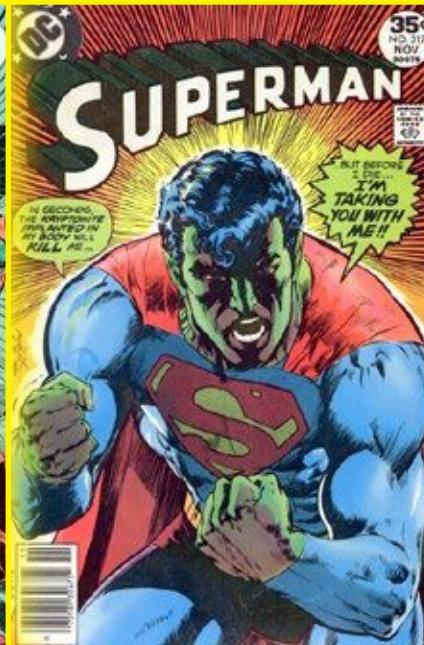
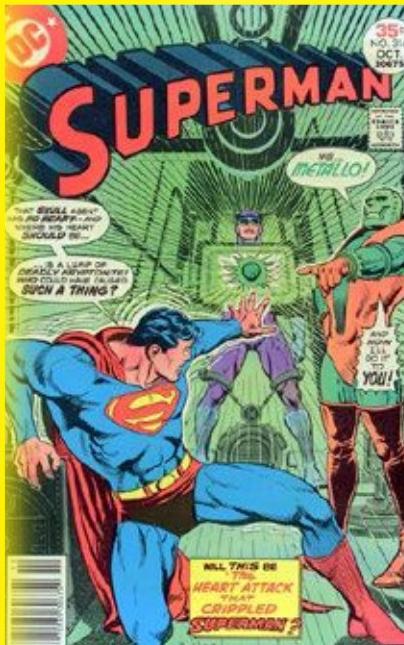
KRYPTONITE:

THE GREEN, GREEN GLOW OF HOME

By Robin Pierce



As we're celebrating the release of *BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE*, we thought we'd cast an eye over the various types of rock from the MAN OF STEEL's destroyed home...



You'd think it was easy being Superman. You can fly, see through solid objects as long as they're not made of lead, you can squeeze diamonds out of coal, you're strong, you're cool, you can date Lois Lane – you've got it made, right?

Wrong. You're the last son of Krypton. That means you're the last surviving male orphan from a world in a galaxy (with apologies to George Lucas) far away. And that world blew up, along with everything you knew and held dear (except a cousin, a super villain despot, a dog, a monkey, etc. – see page 22). But worse – chunks of your planet followed you to Earth and landed here as meteorites. Yes, they're colourful and completely harmless to us humans; well, in all cases apart from the rarely seen Anti-Kryptonite, but more on that later. But to you, Kal-El – they're poison. And worse.

Having created a Man of Steel whose powers were increasing – once only able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, now able to actually fly, and eventually becoming almost god-like in his invulnerability, DC Comics realised that there wasn't a great deal that could harm

him. And if the hero can't be harmed, then where's the story? Where's the conflict and the drama? How can he be a hero if he's not risking himself?

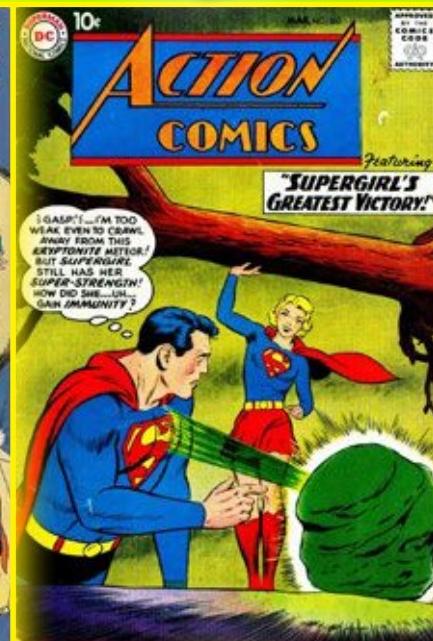
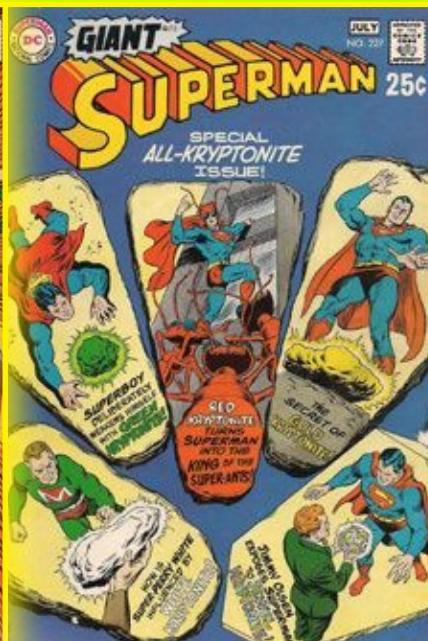
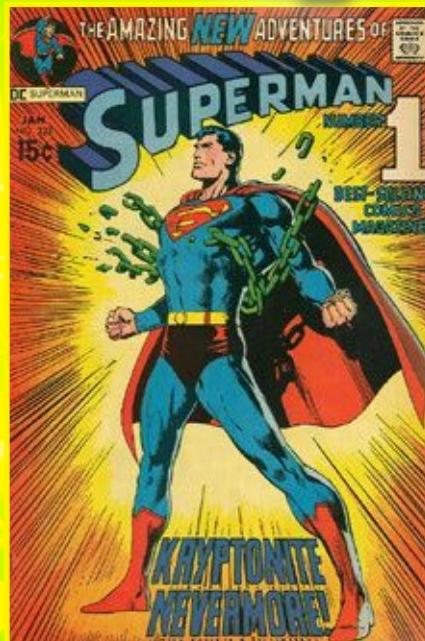
An Achilles heel was needed.

Superman creator and writer Joe Siegel first introduced Kryptonite in an unpublished novel called *The K-Metal from Krypton* in 1940. But the first that fans would hear of the deadly mineral was in the daily radio serial *The Adventures of Superman* in 1943, when voice actor Bud Collyer wanted a holiday. So Siegel's concept of Kryptonite was dusted off in a story arc called *The Meteor from Krypton* which allowed Collyer to skip several days of episodes while an unnamed stand-in groaned dramatically in pain as Superman was caught in a Kryptonite trap awaiting rescue. It would be another six years before the ore was embraced in the comic strip and became an essential part of the canon in *Superman* #61.

Originally, what would become the deadly green rock was coloured red, although Superboy had encountered an even earlier purple variety. It didn't become its familiar sinister hue until *Action Comics* #161

in 1951. But the red version didn't stay gone for long – the sci-fi-crazy fifties saw an abundance of different coloured varieties of Kryptonite – each presenting a varying level of threat to Superman, as each would affect him differently. This opened the floodgates for an abundance of different storytelling opportunities, as Red Kryptonite, for example, would cause an unpredictable temporary mutation – causing Clark Kent problems of nightmare proportions in keeping his Superman identity a secret.

In time, Superman's vulnerability to Kryptonite became tedious, as it seemed there was just too much of the stuff around to allow him to do anything heroic because every small-time crook in the world knew how to nullify his power. So, in 1971, a creative decision was taken to have a chain reaction that turned all Kryptonite on Earth into harmless iron. From issue 233 of *Superman*, featuring a cover that depicted him breaking free of a Green Kryptonite chain (above the proclamation of *Kryptonite Nevermore!*), Superman was now free to be truly Super again, with his only weakness on Earth being sorcery or black magic. It didn't take long for the writers, or the readers



for that matter, to realise that once again he was too powerful, and there were only so many magical threats that could be written. The dire threat of tedium meant that Kryptonite needed to be reintroduced. Luckily, the writers had left an escape clause in the story – only the Kryptonite already on Earth at the time of the chain reaction was turned harmless. There was always more of the stuff hitting the Earth in meteorite form from space. And it was unaffected.

Over the years, the varieties of Kryptonite have increased substantially, but here is the official and complete STARBURST guide to Superman's biggest weakness.

GREEN – This is the most common of all Kryptonite types. Its green glow stops the Man of Steel in his red-booted tracks, sapping his strength slowly, eventually killing him with radiation poisoning – unless he can get far enough away from it, or is shielded from its rays by lead. A popular trap, of course, is to hide it behind lead, as Superman's X-ray vision can't see through the element. As soon as he moves the shielding, he's exposed.

Originally, Green Kryptonite was

established as being harmless to humans, but there has been a storyline where Lex Luthor became fatally irradiated by wearing a Kryptonite ring to keep his arch nemesis at bay. It's also worth noting that Superman has given Batman a chunk of it, as insurance in case he ever needs to take the Kryptonian out of the picture. We can only assume that Batman has a lead-lined case in his utility belt.

RED – This is the unpredictable one. Exposed to its rays, Superman can develop just about any symptom. He can even go as far as to develop an insect's head. Literally ANYTHING can, and has happened. Red Kryptonite was also carried over to the *Smallville* TV series, where its effects were usually to make the normally placid Clark Kent turn into a moody, bike-riding, black leather-wearing teenage delinquent.

BLUE – An 'imperfect' form of the substance, harmless to Kryptonians, but with a deadly effect on the 'imperfect' Bizarro race.

WHITE – Deadly to all plant life, everywhere.

GOLD – This is Kryptonite affected by atomic radiation and originally removed

a Kryptonian's powers permanently by affecting their reaction to a yellow sun. Lately retconned to only temporarily removing powers.

JEWEL – Also known as Kryptonite Six (it was introduced after the five types above), this affects only the criminals of Krypton still trapped in the Phantom Zone. It gives them the power to influence and control people telepathically.

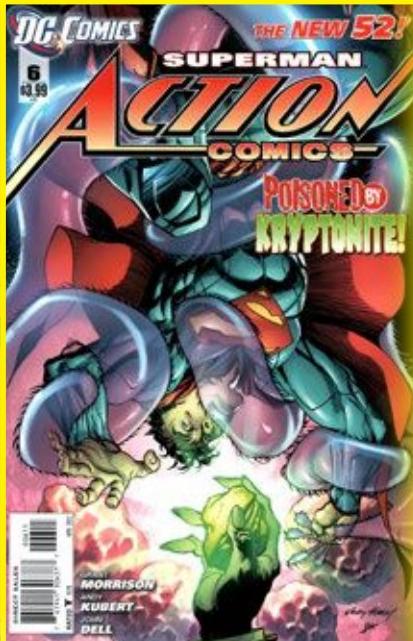
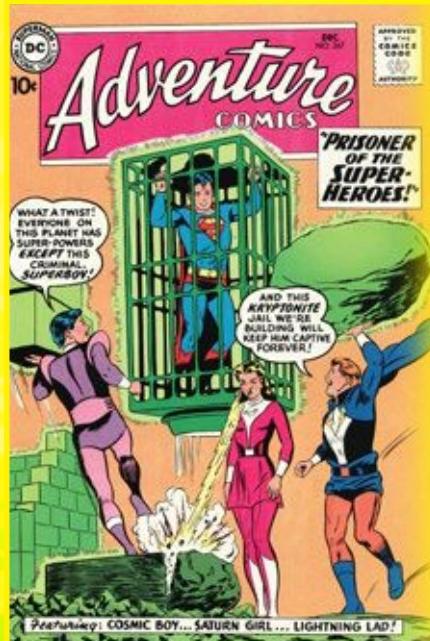
SILVER – Causes Kryptonians to suffer delusions.

PINK – This was mentioned in passing in a Supergirl comic in 2004, though never actually featured in a story. Pink Kryptonite allegedly turns Kryptonians gay.

BLACK – Splits Kryptonians into two – one good, one evil (oddly, in the films, this is the same effect the artificial Green Kryptonite had on our hero in *Superman III*).

ORANGE – Bestows super powers on any animal for 24 hours.

PERIWINKLE – Like Pink, possibly non-canon. Allegedly makes Kryptonians lose all inhibitions.



And then, there were the amalgamations and offshoots...

RED-GREEN – An alloy developed by Brainiac. It gave Superman a temporary third eye.

RED-GREEN – Not the one developed by Brainiac above, but another version that permanently removes a Kryptonian's powers.

RED-GOLD – Gives Kryptonians temporary amnesia.

RED-GREEN - BLUE-GOLD – Non-canon, it split Superman into two beings with enhanced intelligence in an 'imaginary story' in 1962.

RED-GREEN - GOLD – Again, non-canon, this also featured in an imaginary story. It not only removes a Kryptonian's powers forever, but it also wipes their memories of ever having had super powers.

BIZARRO RED – This affects only humans, but in the same crazy and unpredictable way that Red Kryptonite affects Kryptonians.

ANTI-KRYPTONITE – Harmless to Kryptonians, but lethal to humans.

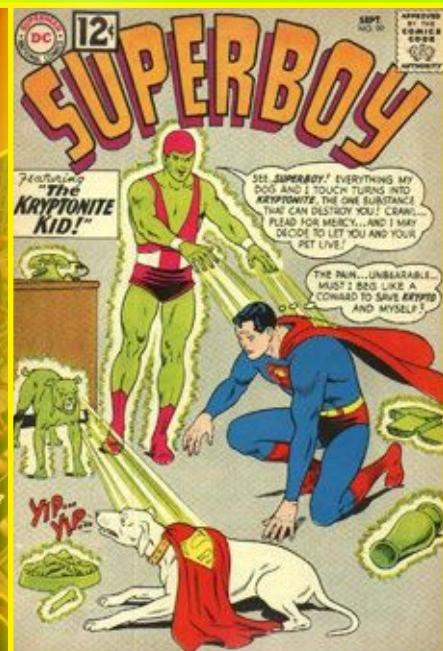
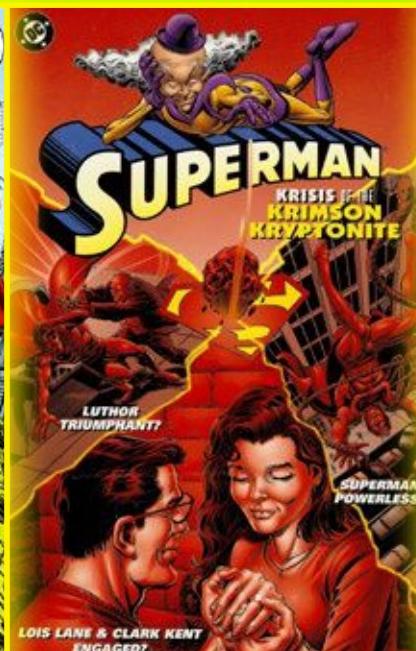
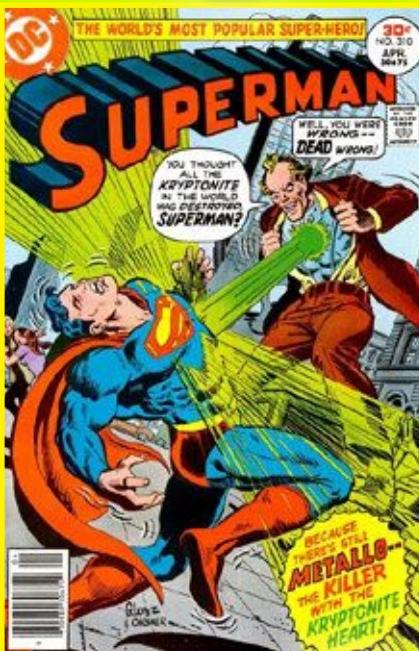
MAGNO-KRYPTONITE – An artificial mineral that is magnetically attracted to anything from Krypton.

X-KRYPTONITE – A synthetic Kryptonite developed by Supergirl to try and nullify the effects of the green version. She failed in her experiment and threw it away. Her cat, Streaky, found it and it gave him super powers.

KRYPTONITE X – No, not X-Kryptonite, this is different! This was created following an unpredicted one-in-a-million accident with Green Kryptonite that changed its properties and actually supercharged Superman when he had lost his powers.

SLOW KRYPTONITE
Another artificial modification that affects humans the same way Green affects Kryptonians.

So there we have it, all the deadly colours of the rainbow – each with its own unique property. There may yet be further forms of Kryptonite, as yet undiscovered, floating about in space – or on a trajectory to Earth, Superman's adopted home, where our yellow sun will react with the mineral, ready to cause the last son of Krypton more pain and misery.



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



Moffat Out, Chibnall In

Steven Moffat, *Doctor Who*'s current head writer and executive producer, is to step down after his sixth and final series, to be replaced by Chris Chibnall. The timeline for upcoming episodes now stands as follows:

- 2016 – No new episodes until Moffat's Christmas special.
- Spring 2017 – Series Ten, with Moffat in charge, Peter Capaldi as the Doctor, and a new companion.
- 2018 – Chibnall makes his showrunner debut with Series Eleven.

Since taking up the post in 2010, Moffat has introduced us to the Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors and become a controversial showrunner, loved by some fans and hated by others. On announcing his departure, he said: "Feels odd to be talking about leaving when I'm just starting work on the scripts for Series 10, but the fact is my timey-wimey is running out. While Chris is doing his last run of *Broadchurch*, I'll be finishing up on the best job in the universe and keeping the TARDIS warm for him. It took a lot of gin and tonic to talk him into this, but I am beyond delighted that one of the true stars of British Television drama will be taking the Time Lord even further into the future. At the start of Series 11, Chris Chibnall will become the new showrunner of *Doctor Who*. And I will be thrown in a skip."

Chibnall, meanwhile, has most recently seen success with crime drama *Broadchurch*, which starred ex-Doctor David Tennant and won a BAFTA for Best Drama Series. He's also written for *Life on Mars* and *Law and Order: UK*, and served as lead writer on the first two series of *Torchwood*. And, of course, he's a lifelong *Doctor Who* fan and has contributed five episodes already: 42, *The Hungry Earth*, *Cold Blood*, *Dinosaurs on a Spaceship*, and *The Power of Three*. Though his *Doctor Who* scripts have achieved

inconsistent success, if Chibnall's take on the show can match the quality of the first series of *Broadchurch*, we could be in for a treat come 2018.

On his new gig, Chibnall said: "*Doctor Who* is the ultimate BBC programme: bold, unique, vastly entertaining and adored all around the world. So it's a privilege and a joy to be the next curator of this funny, scary and emotional family drama. I've loved *Doctor Who* since I was four years old, and I'm relishing the thought of working with the exceptional team at BBC Wales to create new characters, creatures and worlds for the Doctor to explore. Steven's achieved the impossible by continually expanding *Doctor Who*'s creative ambition while growing its global popularity. He's been a dazzling and daring showrunner, and hearing his plans and stories for 2017, it's clear he'll be going out with a bang. Just to make my life difficult."

With the change in leadership, the inevitable rumours about whether Peter Capaldi will stay on after Moffat's exit have begun, with some sources implying that Chibnall will pick a new lead to star as the Thirteenth Doctor. This would make sense in terms of giving Chibnall a clean slate, as Moffat had in 2010, though many fans would be sad to see Capaldi's Doctor go.

That's a long way off yet, though. For now, we're in 2016, and there's no new *Doctor Who* this year. Or is there? Read on for news on the spin-off and tie-ins that'll be keeping us entertained instead...





Awards Success for RTD, but no NTA for Doctor Who

Our congratulations go to former showrunner Russell T Davies, who was presented with the 'Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award' at the Writers' Guild of Great Britain Awards on January 18th. Davies revived *Doctor Who* in 2005 and served as lead writer until 2010; during this period, he also executive produced *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. His new adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, starring Bernard Cribbins, will be broadcast later this year. On receiving the award, Davies said: "For me, this is the greatest of honours, coming from fellow writers, and I'm enormously grateful to the Writers' Guild – for this, and for the work it does for writers everywhere."

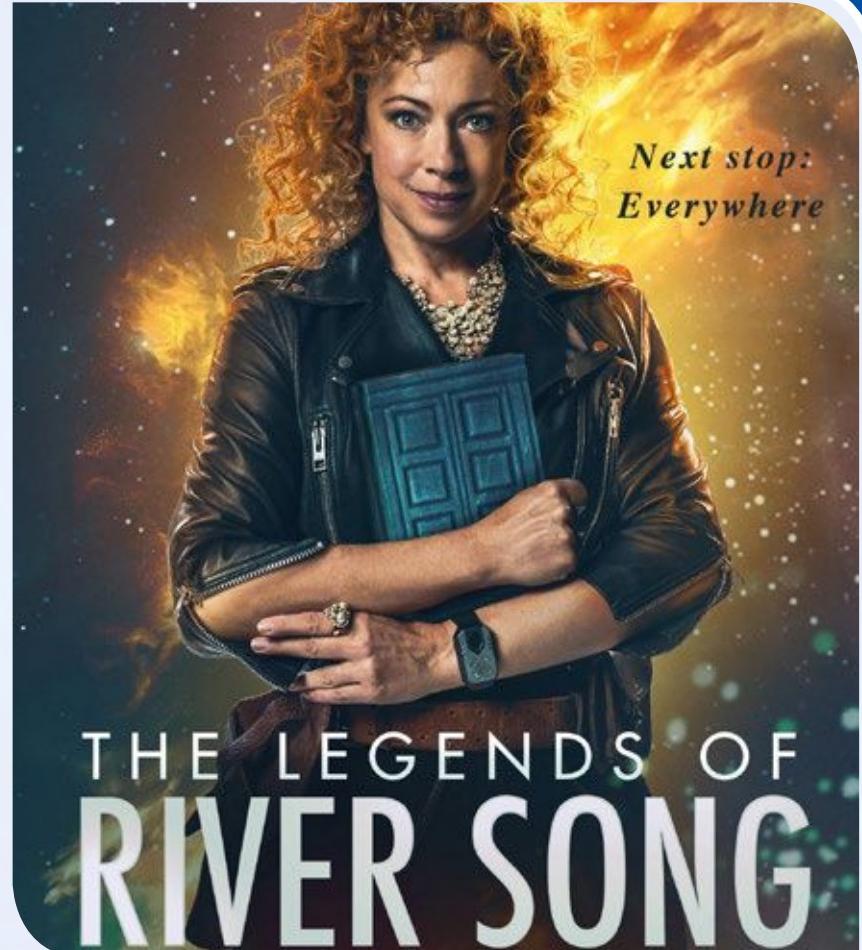
Two days later, the National Television Awards were held, and despite being nominated in the Drama category, Series Nine of *Doctor Who* lost out to *Downton Abbey*. Maybe next year, eh? Oh, yeah. Maybe the year after, then?

CLASS

Upcoming *Doctor Who* spin-off *Class*, previously announced as a BBC Three production, is now confirmed as a co-production with BBC America.

The eight-part series, written by bestselling American Young Adult writer Patrick Ness, will follow a group of pupils from London's Coal Hill School, which originally appeared in the very first *Doctor Who* episode back in 1963 and recently showed up as Clara Oswald's place of work.

The involvement of BBC America, who are also producing a new adaptation of former *Doctor Who* script editor Douglas Adams' *Dirk Gently* books, is good news for American viewers, in that it's guaranteed an almost-simultaneous screening across the pond, and for the quality of the show, in that it should mean a bit more money will be chucked in the budget.



New Literary Adventures with Ten, Donna, and River

Several new book releases have been announced, including returns from popular characters. The Tenth Doctor and Donna Noble will feature in *In the Blood*, a novel from Jenny T. Colgan. A *Bourne Identity*-esque thriller set on contemporary Earth, the story will take Series Four's TARDIS team from busy Seoul to the Brazilian rainforest, facing a threat inspired by internet trolls. Released in May, *In the Blood* will coincide with the Tenth Doctor's first Big Finish audio adventures.

Also of interest is *The Legends of River Song*, expanding on the life of Alex Kingston's spacefaring archaeologist, last seen in the recent Christmas special. Throughout five short tales, River, sometimes accompanied by the Doctor, acts as a consultant for New Venice, helps out an Auton disguised as Elvis, and takes a picnic at Asgard – expanding on a line from *Silence in the Library*. This is out now as an ebook and will be available in hardback from June.

And if all that time-space adventuring makes you hungry, there's *Doctor Who: The Official Cookbook* coming in August, featuring such delights as 'Gingerbread Doctors' and a 'Pandorica to a Dalek Cake'. Nope, no idea what that is, but I'm going to refrain from mocking it just in case it's an incredibly clever culinary pun that's gone way over my head.



Obituary: Robert Banks Stewart (1931 – 2016)

Robert Banks Stewart, a prolific screenwriter who penned two much-loved serials for the Fourth Doctor, has passed away at the age of 84. Stewart began his career as a journalist before moving to television in the 1960s, contributing to shows including *The Sweeney*, *Danger Man*, and *The Avengers*. In 1975, his first *Doctor Who* serial, *Terror of the Zygons*, was broadcast; it was set in his native Scotland and introduced the iconic Zygons, who remain popular villains after their recent reintroduction to the series. He followed this up with 1976's *The Seeds of Doom*, pitting the Doctor against the carnivorous vegetable Krynoi. Stewart later created *Shoestring* and *Bergerac*, two detective series that proved big successes for the BBC. He is survived by a daughter and three sons.

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



Back in the old days, when the actor who was playing the Doctor's companion wanted to leave, the character would suddenly find an excuse not to keep travelling with the Doctor during the last few minutes of their final story – and occasionally, if the viewer was lucky, slightly (but not very much) earlier. The following week, the TARDIS would fetch up on a new planet (very often Earth) and the pluckiest character involved in the new story – you could generally tell which one it was even if you didn't know already – would find some often spurious reason to join the Doctor on his adventures at the end of the story.

Modern television viewers are used to something a touch more sophisticated than that. These days, a character like Adric or Tegan – constantly moaning about wanting to go home and about how little they're enjoying travelling in the TARDIS – wouldn't be regarded as realistic. These days – and in a slightly meta way too, given that essentially we're talking about something the viewer would no doubt like to do – *Doctor Who*'s writers are obliged to provide

not just a good reason for the companion to want to throw themselves into danger every week, but also for the Doctor to want that particular person tagging along. More so, when the actor hands in their notice, the writer then has to find a plausible explanation as for why the status quo has been interrupted on-screen.

When Russell T Davies revived the series in 2005, he was very careful to make Rose somebody with a lifestyle she wanted to escape – and the sci-fi explanation for her later departure was predicated on the romantic connection between the two characters; the audience didn't much care how phoney the justification might actually have been, they just enjoyed getting their hearts broken along with Rose and the Doctor's at the end of *Doomsday* (a tragedy Davies would repeat with Donna two years later). Davies knew that to sell *Doctor Who* to an audience unfamiliar with both the series' concepts and the idea of mainstream science fiction, he needed to root the revival in the characters' emotional lives, lives that the viewers could identify with and respond

to. Martha's rationale for travelling might have been given credibility by her medical backstory, but the more profound reason the character took up with the bug-eyed stick insect was because she fancied the man who whisked her off to the moon and back on their first meeting. Even his name was an aspiration for her.

Davies was also fond of teasing the audience every year that one of the regular characters, ostensibly the companion, wouldn't be making it to the end of the series alive. It was, of course, something of a cheat every time he said it.

But by the time Davies left *Doctor Who*, the series was established enough that his replacement Steven Moffat was able to carefully alter its underlying constitution. Rather than telling stories about emotionally-led characters with bolted-on sci-fi subtexts, Moffat made the relationship angle something more substantial but tangential (Amy Pond actually marries her boyfriend rather than leaving him behind, for example, and thus River Song is conceived aboard the TARDIS), incorporating it into the kind

of science fiction plot conceit that makes Moffat's *Doctor Who* a closer fit for the classic series in spite of retaining Davies' amorous inclinations. He has, as well as anyone would be able, managed to marry the two styles in a way that respects the series' legend as an adventure in time and space.

And he's done it without going overboard about it; there's a reason the modern companions have all been from the 21st century, and that's because as viewers we need (however subliminally) to understand the history and the technology we are introduced to from a 21st century perspective. If something needs explaining (whether overtly or not) about Shakespearian London or New New Earth, there needs to be somebody aboard the TARDIS to whom it can be explained. Moffat has also resisted the further temptation to make his companions 'special' in some other way. Amy Pond is just an ordinary girl to whom something extraordinary happens, and the peculiarly Moffatesque conceit regarding her arrival comes when the Doctor disappears for twelve years, giving her a plausible reason to be fascinated with the time traveller. Clara Oswald is again a normal girl around whom a far from normal circumstance comes into being. She throws herself into the Doctor's timeline (thus setting up the idiosyncrasies of her meeting the Doctor) because she is brave and altruistic, rather than because she's an alien princess or vessel for some monster's grand scheme.

Steven Moffat is also prepared to kill his regular characters off – in spite of his reputation for 'copping out' by resurrecting them. River Song actually dies in *Forest of the Dead* – in a time travel show, being dead in 'our' time has never stopped the Doctor from subsequently meeting up with Churchill or Dickens – and Danny Pink's appearance in *Last Christmas* is only in the imagination of the other characters, rather than being an authentic return from the grave. Neither of which is unacceptable in a series about adventures in time and space.

But Moffat has gone one further than his predecessor. Whereas Russell T Davies



was, as an atheist, only too keen to use the iconography of religion in a way that sometimes felt like he was ridiculing those for whom it was important – most clearly in *Last of the Time Lords*, but there are examples of it everywhere during his showrunnership – his successor's *Doctor Who* universe is instead more analogous to religious beliefs without being mocking about it; it's no accident that for two years in a row we've had series finales with the word 'Heaven' in their titles. When Miss Evangelista was saved as a data ghost in *Silence in the Library*, Moffat might initially have been using the conceit as a basis to include supernatural elements with 'rational' explanations in his story, but the end of *Forest of the Dead* betrayed a bigger picture; its author was actually posing an afterlife for his characters comparable with the ones promised in most religions, albeit ones that managed to fit within a rational but scientifically expanded universe.

Moffat has also used the notion of a scientifically expanded rational universe to resurrect his characters back into actual life, from time to time, although it's worth noting

that the first two Claras we saw die, actually died. Amy Pond's resurrection thanks to the Pandorica is comparable with the Doctor sitting up and asking what the fuss is about having had Sarah Jane shedding tears all over his apparently dead form, turned into something involving genuine rather than perceived peril. Perhaps Moffat does this kind of thing a little too often, or maybe the viewers prefer their threats to the principal characters to be a little more purported. But Steven Moffat does love to take things the series has only danced around the edges of – time travel, companion death, regeneration – and integrate them into his ongoing storytelling.

Clara's death in *Face the Raven* was performed like something out of the *Harry Potter* films, in an episode surrounding it with familiar imagery, and thus immediately ameliorated the visceral brutality of it in the minds of children. *Heaven Sent* gave those children an insight into the emotional context of grief, while *Hell Bent* was a symbolic discourse on the lengths we would go to for the ones we love. Placing all this in a programme that this time last year had given us two alternative explanations as to why Clara could still see her boyfriend even after he'd been hit by a car, what *Doctor Who* is inviting children to do is enter into a dialogue with their elders about what happens to people after they die – about whether they live on, whether that be in the memories of those they leave behind (like Danny in *Last Christmas*), or whether it be in some other place that we as mortals don't have access to (Danny in *Dark Water*, and Clara herself in *Hell Bent*, who survives but is nevertheless still lost to the Doctor and us) – by framing his analogies within a sci-fi context.

Steven Moffat has elevated *Doctor Who* to a higher art form, one that is more openly inclusive to either side of the secular divide, and that's because the writer is making a more open-minded series. It just takes a more opened mind to see beyond the shenanigans and appreciate what's going on under the surface.





NO JOB FOR A HERO

Is it possible to combine the demands of a regular job with the added pressure of being a hero? Clark Kent, who is, of course, a reporter for *The Daily Planet* when not donning that famous blue outfit complete with the iconic 'S', and Spider-Man, AKA Peter Parker, is a photographer for *The Daily Bugle*, might argue that it just complicates matters.

Of course, countless others have trodden the path of what might be considered a regular job alongside their famed superheroism. But the line is somewhat blurred when we turn to the Doctor, whose spells being an employee of sorts in their various permutations seem to serve his own ends perhaps even more so than the examples above?

It's not impossible to sympathise with the circumstances in which he's forced to seek his first and arguably only truly long-term earthbound job. Exiled here at the end of *The War Games*, forced to regenerate and deprived of the opportunity to take the TARDIS off-world, his third incarnation will, of course, become a scientific adviser to UNIT, with Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart as his boss.

This period would frequently find him voicing the frustrations of many a downtrodden employee, perhaps best illustrated by *Inferno* - which showed both him and us that sometimes the more things change, the more they stay the same. "Pompous, self-opinionated idiot" indeed - even though he had, in effect, saved his new charge from the temporal scrapheap and allowed him to indulge his thirst for adventure, albeit on a smaller

scale, seemingly his sole motivation to sign up in the first place...

"Money? My dear chap, I don't want money. I've got no use for the stuff." In exchange for his purely voluntary help in keeping the planet, which has in effect given him refuge, safe he asks for no more than "facilities to repair the TARDIS, a laboratory, equipment" etc. He'll also gain a new companion in the form of one Liz Shaw. The real clincher probably

comes when he's offered the chance to acquire a car just like the one he'll take a shine to come the conclusion of the first chance he gets to try out his new body.

"I took to that car. It had character," as he puts it, and in so doing gets possibly the ultimate company vehicle in the yellow dream machine that is Bessie! "I mean, it could persuade me to stay, you know..."

Many of us may well, though, relate to his assertion that he had better things





to do than run around after the Brig in the immediate aftermath of the symbolic shedding of his velvet shirt in favour of teeth, curls and scarf!

Luckily, the pressures of a real-world career would leave him, by and large, until he'd swapped all that for a question mark pullover. The return visit to Coal Hill School for *Remembrance of the Daleks*, then, might well have left many wondering just why a janitorial position piqued his curiosity...

HEADMASTER: And you would be?
DOCTOR: The Doctor. And you?
HEADMASTER: I'm the Headmaster here. Doctor, eh? Well, you're a bit over-qualified for the position, but if you would like to leave your particulars and references.
DOCTOR: References?
HEADMASTER: You are here for the job of school caretaker?

On that occasion, he wasn't enticed by the prospect of a new coat and brush. The chance of a 9-5 shift battling sinister puddles at the venerable educational establishment, which had, of course, given leg-ups to the careers of teachers Ian Chesterton and Barbara Wright, would have to wait. At least, until the Twelfth Doctor mulled it over, had second thoughts and went to back to it. Whereas his earlier self had been there monitoring the Hand of Omega, the new man was more concerned with the robotic menace of the Skovox Blitzer.

DOCTOR: I'm the new caretaker. John Smith.
DANNY: Welcome to Coal Hill, Mister Smith.
DOCTOR: Thanks. Yes, John Smith's the name. But, you know, here's a thing. Most people just call me the Doctor.

Lest we forget his 'caretaker's box' into the bargain!

And in so doing, co-writer Gareth

Priorities are, of course, important in these matters, too. "Can you hold? I have to eat a biscuit." Eagle-eyed viewers may well have been able to spot if the dunkable treat in question was a Jammy Dodger - a fondness first professed in *Victory of the Daleks* and again in *The Impossible Astronaut*.

Re-acquaintance with Craig Owens brought with it another change of job in a sense, this one arguably playing to his strengths as he brought a sense of childlike glee into his work for a local department store. "I'm the Doctor. I work in a shop now. Here to help. Look, they gave me a badge with my name on in case I forget who I am. Very thoughtful, as that does happen."

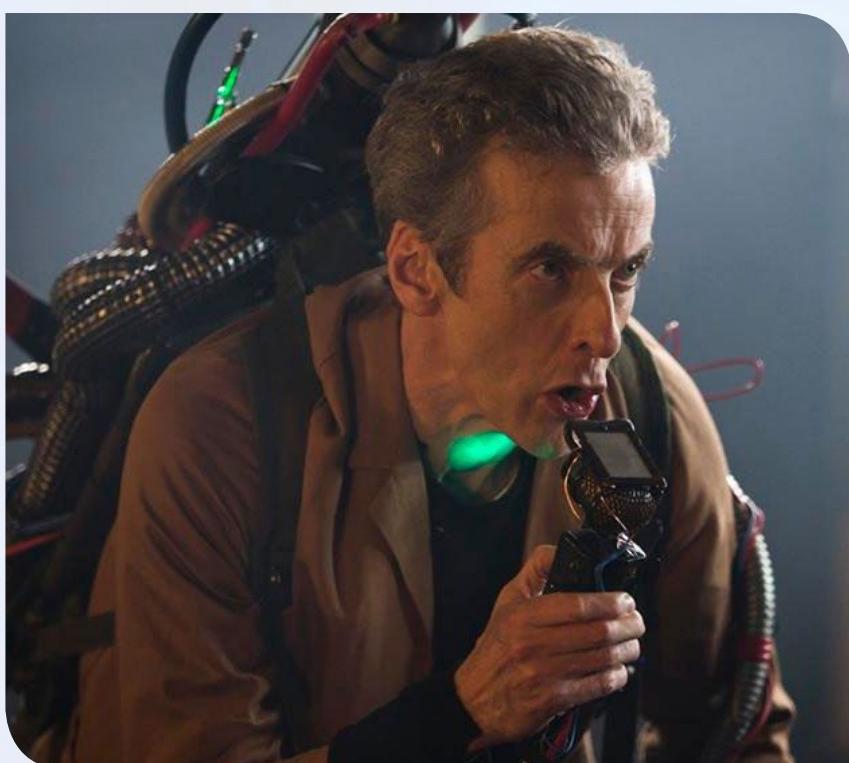
Arguably his target market was indeed children, as demonstrated in *The Beast Below*, he was never simply one for standing by when the younger generation found themselves in danger. Happily, here he finds himself in no more strenuous a situation than attempting to sell them toys and prevent their parents wasting money on dull everyday items like lamps and vegetables.

Let's face it, he's probably right. Grow into the world of work we all must, though, and inevitably that catches up with you, however, many hundreds of years old you may be. "Saw a shop, got a job."

Proof that that doesn't necessarily mean you have to grow up soon arrives, with perhaps the merest hint of sorrow at the passing of carefree days gone by. "Yappy. The robot dog. Not so much fun as I remember."

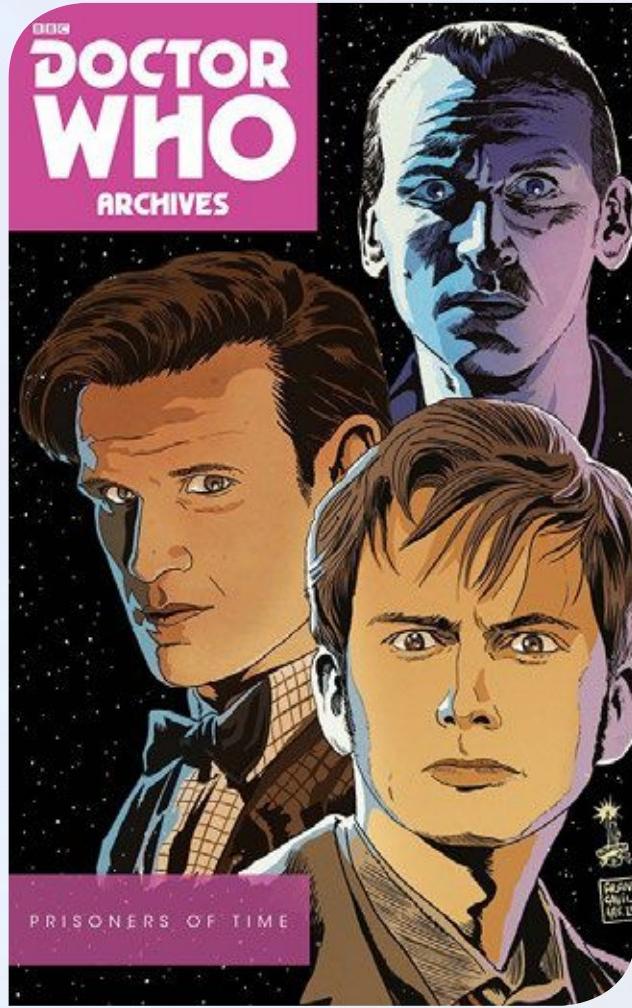
Makes sticking a metaphorical two fingers up at dear old Lethbridge-Stewart feel so long ago...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



**DOCTOR WHO:
PRISONERS OF TIME OMNIBUS**
WRITERS: SCOTT TIPTON, DAVID TIPTON / ARTISTS: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Doctor Who Prisoners of Time Omnibus collects together the 2013 anniversary series of stories written by Scott and David Tipton. They were illustrated by a vast range of artists, including some classic artists from the history of the Doctor Who comic strips. There is also a set of essays giving a potted history of Doctor Who in comics and setting out their place in the progress of the show and the relevance they had.

For anyone who already

has the individual titles, or earlier three-part collections, there is little new here except the convenience of a single 304-page compendium. For fans new to this release they have the chance to relish a massive multi-Doctor/multi-companion story. The story first has eleven instalments (no War Doctor nor appearance for Capaldi) each with a single Doctor and one or more companions. The format is simple – Doctor arrives, a local problem gets sorted and right at



the end as he is about to leave, his companions get kidnapped. As time progresses, the Doctor begins to understand his foe and begins to influence events. The Master appears as a threat but it is made clear he is not the main villain of the piece. For those who have yet to read this, all that needs to be said is the Tipton brothers have been rather astute in finding a foe for the Doctor, even if the final part doesn't do much to break the mould of a classic tale.

Originally released in the anniversary year, the final part is a chaotic multi-Doctor all-at-once melee, supported by a vast collection of companions before the inevitable happy ending. For the anniversary year this was as it should be. Outside that context, it is rather self-indulgent and the ending is only saved by nature of the salvation of the enemy.

The artwork is varied as a consequence of the range

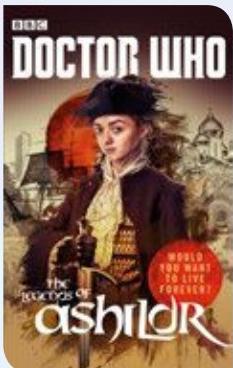
of artists and it has to be said many of them fail to capture the characters at all well. Some stories seem aimed squarely at a young audience (at least visually) others have light and shade both visually and in terms of narrative. The range of stories does mean there should be something for everybody and it is hard to find fault with the Second, Third and Sixth Doctor stories.

For anyone less familiar with the history of Doctor Who in comic form, this is informative in places, and does give an insight into the lasting appeal of comic companions such as Frobisher the penguin.

In summary, if you have a version of this already, there is little reason to add a further version; if you haven't, there is a lot here for the investment.

TONY JONES





DOCTOR WHO: LEGENDS OF ASHILDR

AUTHORS: JUSTIN RICHARDS, DAVID LLEWELLYN, JAMES GOSS, JT COLGAN / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Played by Game of Thrones star Maisie Williams, Ashildr, a young Viking girl killed at the end of the Doctor's encounter with Odin and his Mire warriors at the end of Series Nine's *The Girl Who Died* is the latest attempt from Moffat-era Doctor Who to create a popular, crowd pleasing recurring character. Ashildr popped up again at various points in history

during the series, not least in the finale *Hell Bent*, where she ended up as an ersatz companion for the nearly-dead Clara as she wandered off into Space and Time in her own TARDIS. So, we have a reluctant immortal, drifting through Time and bumping into the Doctor occasionally; think John Barrowman's Captain Jack Harkness with all the wit, warmth and charisma sucked out and you're nearly there.

Presumably someone, somewhere, thought that Ashildr/Series Nine were destined to be runaway smash hits with the fans and, as a result, here's a motley quartet of short(ish) stories chronicling some of Ashildr's historical adventures when the Doctor wasn't around, and most specifically between his first and second encounters with her (the series logo features prominently on the cover and there's a TARDIS on the back as a sort of belt-and-braces exercise). Ashildr's adventures fit perfectly into the whimsical fairy tale world of Moffat's Doctor Who and these stories are gossamer-thin romps

filed with medieval magical castles, princes, unlikely fanciful monsters and all the stuff that rarely sits well in Doctor Who's once-tougher and more muscular and ruthless Universe.

The main problem with Ashildr is that – immortality notwithstanding – she's just not a hugely interesting character to read about, and whilst the authors have done their best, the flat, bland performances by Maisie Williams on TV have really given them very little to work with in terms of injecting the character with any excitement or vivacity. Of the four stories, Justin Richards' Arabian Knights-style caper is not without its charm, whilst David Llewellyn's romping story sees 'Ash' join the crew of a rogue vessel setting out to find a mythical land of gold. Colgan's story is set in London during the time of the Black Death and ties up TV series continuity by explaining on-screen references during her second encounter with the Doctor in *The Woman Who Lived to the death of Ashildr's children* and in *The Ghosts of Branscombe Wood*, set shortly

before her second encounter with the Doctor. Ashildr has become more of a detached loner as she investigates mysterious apparitions in a forest at dead of night.

Modern Doctor Who has often excelled in expanding the backstory of many of its more interesting supporting characters and, in theory, there might have been expected to have been a lot of mileage in the 'untold' adventures of the Doctor's latest acquaintance. But with most of Series Nine having fallen on stony ground and Ashildr having been received with little more than indifference and disinterest from the general audience, it's hard to imagine who but the determined hardcore are likely to find much entertainment value in the mundane adventures of a very run-of-the-mill secondary character who, hopefully, we'll not be troubled by again on TV or any other medium.

PAUL MOUNT



THE CHURCHILL YEARS: VOLUME 1

DIRECTOR: KEN BENTLEY / AUTHORS: PHIL MULRYNE, ALAN BARNES, JUSTIN RICHARDS, KEN BENTLEY / STARRING: IAN MCNEICE, DANNY HORN, HOLLY EARL, EMILY ATACK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Set both before and after the events of 2010's 'Victory of the Daleks', this four-part adventure, *The Churchill Years*, sees Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his various allies (including Christmas companions Kazran Sardick and Lily Arwell) contending with alien forces in different moments of his life, whilst also crossing paths with the Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Doctors. As he keeps "buggering on" in the past, present and future, he starts to question his own leadership, as well as his own mortality.

The idea of having the

entire audio adventure be about Ian McNeice's Churchill was a riskier challenge than having River Song in her audio stories, yet in the hands of Big Finish, Churchill works incredibly well, more so than his 2010 TV episode. The framing of the stories by having Churchill, at the end of his life, writing secret memoirs about his encounters with the Doctor and narrating them was a bold device that works well in context with what happens within these four narratives. Plus, since Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant and Matt Smith were unavailable for recording, McNeice was given an even more Herculean task of having to be the voice of the three Doctors, which was awkward at first yet became more natural as it went on.

Each story does a great job of exploring the mind-set of Winston Churchill and his struggles during the Second World War and after, exploring the deep turmoil and courage much more than what we did in 'Victory of the Daleks'. The stories also manage to take Churchill's relationship with the Doctor to an even deeper level than before, showing not just the friendship, but the occasional

conflict as well. Plus, we see how these multiple adventures affect those around Churchill and the Doctor, particularly the three main supporting companions in Hetty Warner, Kazran Sardick and Lily Arwell. Despite having different writers, each story has a natural flow and pace to them that doesn't make them feel jarring from one another; both *The Oncoming Storm* and *Hounded* are probably the creepiest and most atmospheric stories, *Living History* feels like a solid natural successor to 'Victory of the Daleks', whilst *The Chartwell Metamorphosis* feels like the perfect lovechild of the Phillip Hinchcliffe era.

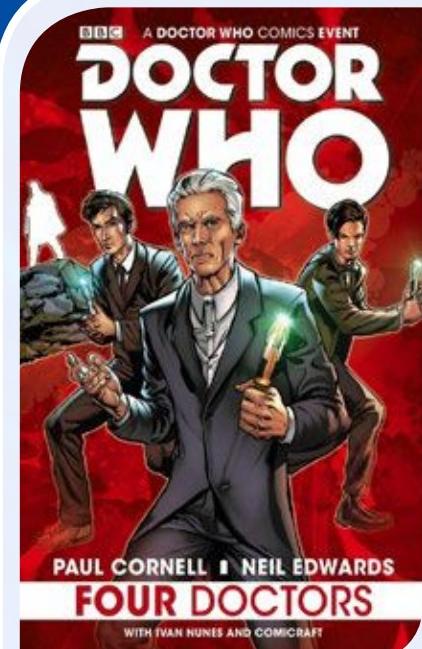
Having first impressed back in 2010, Ian McNeice still gives a credible performance as Churchill, maintaining the warmth, humour, and ferocity the character needed. With each story and each passing of time, McNeice changes his performance to match the narrative's tone and atmosphere, whilst still having a consistency of the character. Emily Atack gives a fantastic turn as Hetty Warner, Churchill's new secretary, who proves herself more than once during the first two stories. Danny Horn adds more intrigue

to the teenage Kazran Sardick, who we saw all too briefly in 2010's fantastic Christmas Special 'A Christmas Carol', and together with Churchill, they provide a perfect comedic double act. Holly Earl's Lily Arwell was one of the very few things that stood out strongly in 2011's abysmal Xmas outing 'The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe', and here we see a more mature, courageous and caring side to her, and Holly Earl plays this fantastically.

Overall, *The Churchill Years* is a brilliant surprise, taking advantage of Churchill's many character traits and uses that for him to play off against any of the fun supporting characters. The quality of the scripts are superb, the interconnections with the on-screen Who stories through Kazran and Lily fan-pleasing, and the performances incredibly solid, most particularly from Ian McNeice, who is still the go to man for playing a credible Churchill. If there are many more of these kinds of adventures to come, then Churchill can KBO through Big Finish for as long as he wants.

RYAN POLLARD





THE DOCTOR WHO EVENT 2015: FOUR DOCTORS

WRITERS: PAUL CORNELL, NEIL EDWARDS /
ARTISTS: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER TITAN COMICS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Doctor is perhaps unique amongst heroes in many ways, but one of his more remarkable powers is his ability to team up with himself. Of course, these team-ups are rare, because it's often quite tricky to get all of the former Doctor Who lead actors together in the

same place whilst they're still young enough to do it. Luckily for us, comic books have no such restrictions.

Last year, Titan Comics released a mini-series called Four Doctors. The Doctor Who Event 2015: Four Doctors compiles all these issues into one graphic novel that easily fits on the shelf. The set-up is pretty simple; we're introduced to the War Doctor, who has teamed up with obscure alien of the week, The Voord to beat up Daleks. The Voord have an agenda of their own, of course and it's nice to see these weird creatures get the spotlight. Events then proceed to drag the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Doctors into one long sequence of time travel hi-jinks.

It's quite clear that writer and Doctor Who mega-fan Paul Cornell is having amazing amounts of fun throughout this book; the author's sheer glee at getting to play with so many distinct characters at once practically shines off every page. In addition to giving the dear old Voord an airing, we get some cracking interaction between the three Doctors. On that subject, part of the 'joke' here is that the story only really covers three Doctors. We see glimpses of others, but really it's about the three post-Time War timelords. Of course, they couldn't call it the Three Doctors, because one of the TV stories has that name. Besides, the Three Doctors only really featured two of them heavily. The same goes for the Five Doctors; only four of them get in on the action. Given this fine tradition of getting the number of Doctors wrong in the story title, the book's name is spot on. Very clever.

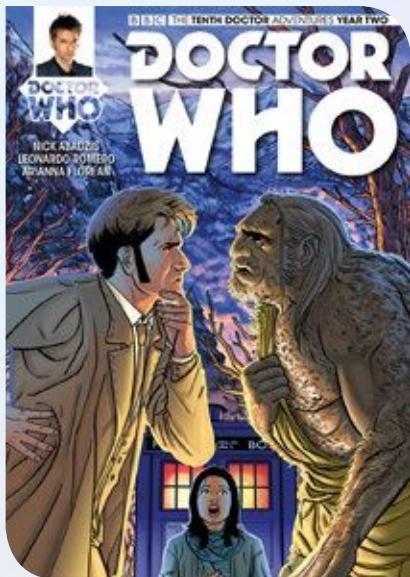
The artwork is solid, as always. Neil Edwards captures the energy of various

companions very well, and he gets the spirit of the various Doctors totally right on each and every page. Of particular note is his take on Capaldi, who not only looks like the Oscar-winning actor, but also looks like a mix of previous incarnations of the Doctor, especially the First and Fourth.

Overall, Four Doctors is a bit of treat. Well worth your time.

ED FORTUNE

***** 8



DOCTOR WHO: THE TENTH DOCTOR YEAR TWO #4

WRITERS: NICK ABADZIS / ARTISTS: LEONARDO ROMERO / PUBLISHER TITAN COMICS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Well, it had to happen eventually. Titan Comics has been producing lots of different Doctor Who comic books, featuring various versions of the well known time-travelling meddler. Thus far, the quality has been amazing and the books have been superb. So it was about time that we ran into a bit of a duff story.

Issue Four of The Tenth Doctor Year Two introduces us to a storyline called Medicine Man, and in theory, it should be a perfectly clever bit of melding between the things comic books can do and the usual craziness The Doctor gets up to on the TV show. The set-up sees the Doctor's companion, Gabby, fend for herself and meet up with a Neanderthal who also happens to be a bit special. Though writer Nick Abadzis dazzles us with clever subtext and commentary on the purpose of art and comics, the actual story is a bit pedestrian.

The problem is that we've seen this sort of plot before; one that explores The Doctor's essentially disruptive nature. Even though this is only one part of a two-parter, it's really easy to see the direction it's going in because so many Doctor Who comic book tales have done this story. In fairness, it's the first time Titan have fallen down this particularly boring rabbit hole,

so hopefully it will also be the last.

Besides all of that, Leonardo Romero's artwork is a pleasure to behold, contrasting simple character design against complex backgrounds. As for the story, here's hoping it picks up soon.

ED FORTUNE

***** 6



BBC

DOCTOR WHO EXPERIENCE

PORTH TEIGR - CARDIFF BAY

JOIN THE TWELFTH DOCTOR ON AN
INTERACTIVE ADVENTURE...



NEW!
Series Nine
exhibition landing
in February*

...then step behind the scenes to view the world's largest collection of Doctor Who props, sets and costumes!

DoctorWhoExperience.com 0844 801 2279

Calls cost 7p per minute plus network charges. *Check the website for full details including details of new exhibits!

BBC



LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM PLANET X

I'm going to be straight with you. When I was growing up, I never watched Star Wars.

Actually, this is the case with more people than you'd think. Many, like me, didn't have Sky or lots of TV channels, so it was never available. And it seemed to be virtually impossible to find on video or DVD - at least, without spending a tonne of money. It wasn't until fairly recently that I was able to watch them, and I've only really watched the prequels once.

I realise that sounds a bit lousy, considering that I'm writing for a sci-fi/cult magazine, but hey, sometimes it's hard to watch these things. It's easy these days with the Internet, but we all know it wasn't always like that.

But that's not all. I have to admit something else.

I always found Star Wars a little overrated.

I know, I know - I'm expecting a few raised eyebrows from that. Don't get me wrong, I think it's a wonderfully innovative and inspirational franchise. It's not only an important landmark in sci-fi but in cinema as a whole, and will certainly stand the test of time. The universe it's set in, the Empire, the Rebel armies, the weird and wonderful aliens, and space pirates are just brilliant. But it's those wonderful worlds and charismatic characters that make the Star Wars franchise immortal, those little gems of humourous moments that were groundbreaking in the sci-fi world - a genre that had previously been rather ponderous and

difficult. Star Wars was a breath of fresh air, light-hearted and accessible.

That being said...

When I eventually watched Star Wars, I wasn't particularly blown away by it. I thought it was fun and cool, and I instantly wanted a lightsaber, naturally. But for me, as a young girl, the lack of women in the movies made it really difficult to relate to. If I'd watched it when I was younger, I don't think I would have had the same reaction, and I would probably have had Star Wars posters all over my room. But, as it was, and even now, I didn't get that same connection with the movies that most other people seem to. As a little girl, gender wasn't a concept I really cared about - a quality that can be quite admirable, I think. But as a young woman, I recognised that the movies' lack of women wasn't right.

Yes, there is Leia, and she is an amazing character - a feminist icon, in fact. But Padmé... well, she was bloody brilliant but was not treated very well at all. She had so much potential to be as strong a female character as Leia, but that didn't quite work out, with her falling in love with a psychopath and subsequent lack of personality. I'm afraid I therefore don't find her a good female character. Even with Leia, and arguably Padmé, these movies are just... such a sausage fest. As a result, I felt like I couldn't be involved in the movies, and found it really hard to connect with them.

It's a dangerous thing, to criticise Star Wars like this in a sci-fi magazine. But it's the honest truth - I was never that into it.



Leia is SO in charge.

The new Star Wars, though? That is a different story.

The Force Awakens makes both boys and girls feel like they can use the force; change the universe. I think if I'd watched this as a little girl, or as a teenager, I would have had a very different perspective on the franchise, and what I could do as a girl.

Having watched it, I think I can officially call myself a Star Wars fan!

Ah, now, I know there will be some people who'll disagree with that. How can I call myself a fan, if I don't adore the old ones? If I don't know every quote by heart and if I haven't loved it since I was a child? Well, I've explained that it wasn't actually possible for me anyway, considering my lack



There is only one woman in this photo and there is no excuse.

STAR WARS HAS HAD ITS ISSUES WITH GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PAST - BUT HOW ABOUT NOW?



"Stop taking my hand!"

of technology as a kid. Not everyone has access to movies.

But it's also important to mention that just because I'm a girl who 'doesn't look' like your stereotypical nerd, and who's only now starting to like Star Wars, doesn't make me any less of a fan. This is what makes you a fan: if you really like something, any of it, and *think* you're a fan, then you are.

And I definitely *really* like Star Wars: *The Force Awakens*.

In the movie, we see Rey, a lone scavenger/mechanic living on Jakku, reluctantly being whisked away with Han Solo, Chewbacca, and Finn, and subsequently saving a planet from destruction. She's tough, she's inquisitive, she's clever, and she gives Han a run for his money when it comes to piloting the Millennium Falcon. When she's captured by Kylo Ren, one of the baddies of the movie, we think that there's nothing more to be done; Ren has incredible power and can manipulate the Force to do whatever he wishes. But Rey? Well, it turns out she's even stronger.

There are some moments where our male characters underestimate Rey - considering the lack of women in positions of power in the Star Wars universe's past, you can see why. But of course, Rey is just

as brilliant as Finn, Poe, Han, or Leia. In fact, it looks like she's stronger than any of them. Which is a little bit awesome.

Rey's development from a lost girl abandoned on Jakku to a blossoming (albeit frightened and confused) Jedi Knight is wonderful, realistic, and exciting. I can relate to this. She is *brilliant*. And so are all the other female characters that crop up in the movie, like Leia, of course, and Maz, and Captain Phasma, and there are even women in the Resistance forces and in the background! You know, like real life!

When Star Wars first came out in '77, it was a breakthrough in science fiction history. It's nice to see that the franchise hasn't lost its touch, as we thought it might have when the prequels were released.

There is the issue of how few Rey toys there are out there at the moment. Which is bizarre, considering that she is pretty much the main character. Leia is criminally ignored in Star Wars merchandise and always has been; it's something we see all the time (how often do you see a Black Widow figurine?). But leaving out Rey? Really? It's good to see this addressed in the next wave of releases.

Besides this big problem, the movie has made a great impact and I think it will seriously help with the progress of

gender equality in film. When Star Wars does something like promote good female characters, people don't ignore it.

Maybe this will spawn a new era of female-led movies. We've had a few, granted. Stuff like *Mad Max: Fury Road* doesn't go unnoticed and certainly has its part to play in bringing equality to the screens - many movies over these past few years have been really good in that respect, encouraging a new wave of feminism, some might say. But Star Wars... Star Wars is eternal. It's one of the most important, influential cinematic creations ever. So for this movie not to have an effect seems absurd to me.

Perhaps - well, I hope - from this point on, things will begin to change for women in film and TV. One day, when a movie with a mostly male cast is released, as they often are, maybe another film with an equally large number of women will be released too, without any moaning and whining that it's 'forced' and 'embarrassing' to watch. Maybe things will be more balanced. Maybe I won't go into the movie theatre and sit through a movie thinking, 'But where are we all? Where are all the women?' Maybe we'll get some wide representation, for women of all kinds.

I think the new Star Wars movies are entirely capable of inspiring that.

ONE CHOICE CAN TRANSFORM YOU

BY ED FORTUNE

ALLEGIANT IS THE LATEST INSTALMENT BASED ON THE DIVERGENT SERIES OF YOUNG ADULT NOVELS. WE TAKE A LOOK AT THIS EXCITING NEW MOVIE AND ATTEMPT TO WORK OUT WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT...



Veronica Roth's bestselling dystopian science fiction *Divergent* series was always a natural choice for a movie franchise. The books, aimed firmly at younger adults, mix action and suspense into a tense yet thought provoking thriller. They explore themes of conformity, identity, social issues, and eugenics, yet at the same time have gripping action and lots of drama. They also happen to be great ideas for a sci-fi epic in the same vein as *Gattaca* and *Soylent Green*, only with younger, more beautiful characters.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world in which everyone is expected to conform to strict social norms and only think in a way that society approves of, *The Divergent Series* focuses on the adventures of Tris, a young woman who

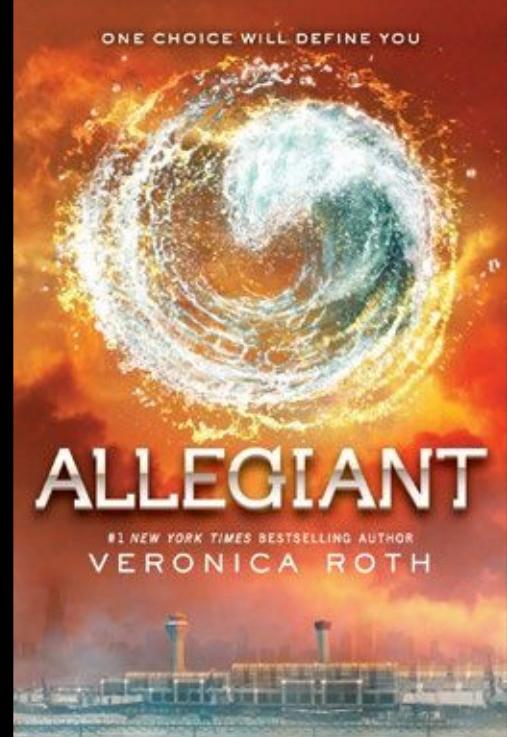
does not fit into a fixed category and is regarded by the authorities as Divergent; the ultimate square peg in a land built for round holes.

Allegiant picks up where the previous movie, *Insurgent*, left off. Following a series of revelations that have rocked society to its foundations (see: The Story So Far), the heroic Tris and her allies have ventured outside the city to seek answers to how their society came to be so messed up in the first place. Meanwhile, civil war rages, threatening to end what remains of civilisation.

The movie is based on the final book in the series. However, the producers decided that this last instalment needed to be told in two parts, with the final film being called *Ascendant*, planned for release on June 9th, 2017. Fans of the cinematic versions of *The Hunger Games* may recall that they did the same thing for that series, with reasonable results and minimal fan grumbling. *The Divergent Series* has so far followed the books quite closely, but it seems likely we'll be getting a change in the order of events for these last two movies to spread the action around, with scenes taking place both in the ruins of Chicago and beyond.

However, unlike the adaptations of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *The Hobbit*, it's relatively plain to fans of the books that this division has been done for purely commercial reasons. Part of the appeal





WHAT ABOUT THE BOOKS?

As mentioned, the *Divergent* phenomenon started out as a series of novels by Veronica Roth. They follow a formula that is familiar to fans of Young Adult books. They have a strong female lead who is different from other girls and are set in a near-future that serves as an analogy for the challenges that the average adolescent faces while growing up. The main difference between Roth's work and the likes of *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* is how normal the lead characters are. The fundamental twist of the *Divergent* series is that Tris' outsider nature is something we can all relate to on some level.

Plot-wise, the films follow the books fairly closely. Key scenes really don't change, and the plot structure is pretty much the same. The real difference is in the emotional journey of the characters; book Tris is far more sympathetic and cautious than the bold and dauntless Tris in the movies, though they pretty much go through the same adventures. The world is also less grubby in the big screen versions and substantially more claustrophobic. It's likely that *Allegiant* will follow the same formula, with the darkness increasing as more secrets are revealed.

Though there are four *Divergent* books and four movies planned in total, it's worth noting that the fourth book is actually a collection of short stories that mostly focus on the character of Four. Roth certainly doesn't seem to be stopping when it comes to producing tales of her popular world and has said that she still has plenty more tales to tell. She's also recently signed a two-book deal with publisher Harper Collins to write a book about a boy who forms an unlikely alliance with an enemy, and how they help each other attain what they most desire. Time will tell if that also becomes a movie.





THE STORY SO FAR...

The *Divergent* series is set in Chicago, sometime in the 'not too distant' future. Something has gone wrong with civilisation, and humanity hides in the vast city, safe behind a massive walled structure called 'The Fence'. Society has been divided into factions. The selfless Abnegation rule through kindness and administer resources. The peaceful Amity work the land, while the blunt Candor negotiate and debate. The series mostly focuses on the intellectual and scientific Erudite and the brave Dauntless, who make up the military caste. Most people tend to stay in the faction they are born to, but everyone has the choice to switch. The society has two major coming-of-age rituals. The Aptitude Test involves the mind-altering simulation serum, a drug that allows the candidate to work out which faction they belong to, and this is followed by a very public choosing ritual. Once you choose a faction, that is it, you can't go back. If you fail to integrate, you become Factionless, part of a subcaste of people with no rights, resources, or role.

The heroine of the series is Beatrice Prior (Shailene Woodley), also known as Tris. Though raised as a member of Abnegation, the test she takes reveals that she is Divergent; able to fit into many castes. Unfortunately, this goes against the foundation this offbeat society is

built on; Divergent people are outcast or killed. Luckily, she evades discovery, and trying to fit in, joins the Dauntless faction. During her training, she hooks up with the enigmatic Dauntless hero Four (Theo James). Partially due to her different nature, Tris uncovers a conspiracy by one faction to overthrow the status quo. The heroes prevent atrocities from happening, but the evil Erudite leader Jeanine (Kate Winslet) declares martial law.

The heroes make it to the outskirts of Chicago, where the Factionless lurk. Luckily, they make allies amongst the outcasts, and we learn more about who Four is and how he came to become part of Dauntless. Meanwhile, the factions are descending into full-scale civil war, with the Candor desperately trying to smooth things over. More mind-altering drugs and truth serums are used, and the Erudite start using their weaponised simulation serum to make more people obey their will.

Throughout all of this, there is a unique cube left behind by the society's founders. It can only be opened by the Divergent, and reveals terribly important information that affects all the factions. The information within leads Tris to believe that the only way to save what remains of Chicago is to venture outside The Fence. Which is where *Allegiant* begins. We'll have to watch it to find out what happens next... then wait for the final part in 2017.

of Veronica Roth's books is that they're very accessible, and it's hard to perceive exactly what needed to be split up. Given that the first two movies miss out some of the finer details, it will be interesting to see what they do to fill the gaps. It is very likely that these last two movies are to be much darker than before, simply to keep them at a decent length.

Picking up the challenge of such a marked change in tone and style to the previous works is director Robert Schwentke. He's no stranger to genre movies; he directed *The Time Traveller's Wife* in 2009. He's also got a proven track record for clever and well thought out action scenes, and was responsible for the 'retired spy' action thriller

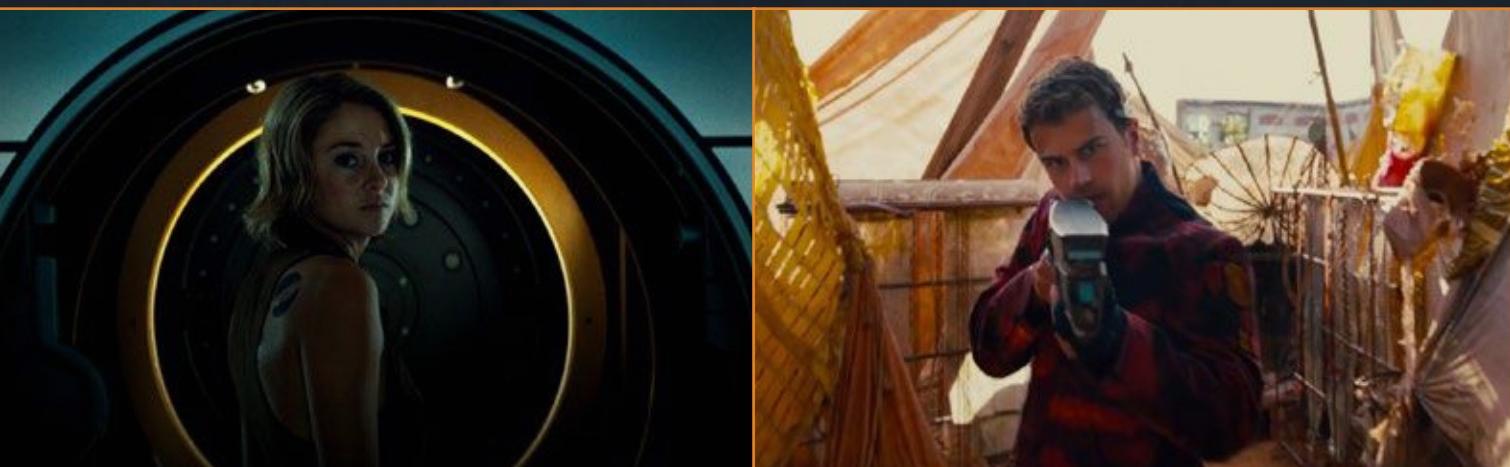
RED. He's an interesting choice, being both comfortable with high tension melodrama and considered bursts of onscreen violence.

More interesting is the choice of Noah Oppenheim to write the screenplay. His previous work includes adaptations of George Orwell's *1984*, and he also wrote the script for the movie version of the classic Young Adult work, *The Maze Runner*. He seems a pretty clear choice for the grim future of *Allegiant*, and combined with Schwentke's direction, we're expecting to see moodily lit and well-considered scenes throughout.

Though there are more stories beyond *Allegiant* and *Ascendant* to tell, it is looking likely that we won't see them

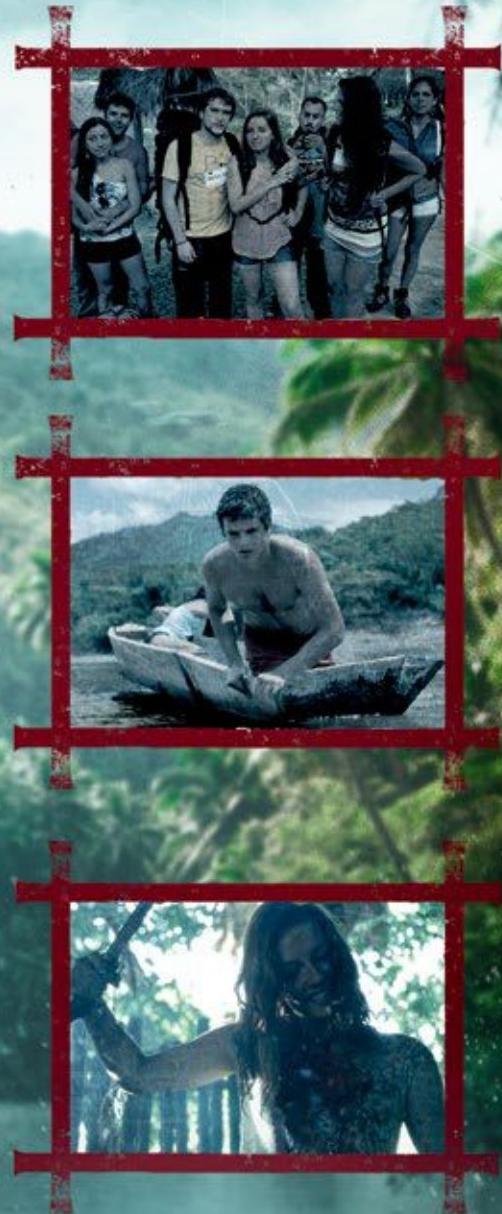
anytime soon. Lead heroine Shailene Woodley's next project is Oliver Stone's *Snowden*, a biographical, political thriller film based on the life of Edward Snowden. Even more damningly, the actor Theo James is already slated to appear in another instalment of supernatural nonsense-fest *Underworld*. Theo plays the character of Four in the *Divergent* series, and the only stories not yet adapted to film feature that character quite heavily. It's looking like once we've hit *Ascendant*, that's all we're going to get. Until they adapt another post-apocalyptic Young Adult novel, of course.

THE DIVERGENT SERIES: ALLEGIANT
hits UK screens on March 11th.



"A MARIO BAVA STYLE BLOODBATH
WHICH BRINGS SOMETHING NEW
TO THE TEENS-IN-PERIL GENRE"

CAMBRIDGE FILM FESTIVAL



EVIL LIES WITHIN

OUT ON DVD 22ND FEBRUARY
PRE-ORDER NOW

matchbox films

amazon.co.uk

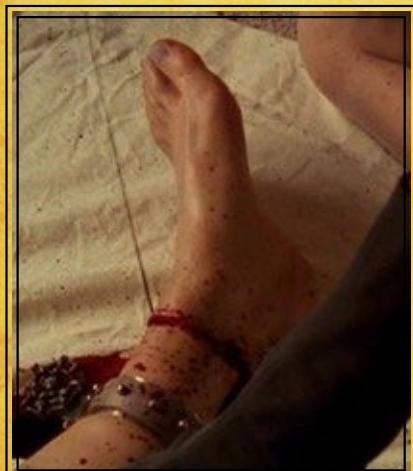
Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.



TRUST IN PAIN

by John Townsend

SEVENTEEN YEARS AFTER ITS FIRST RELEASE, TAKASHI MIIKE'S CHILLING AUDITION STILL HOLDS THE POWER TO SHOCK AND REPULSE, AS WE WILL DISCOVER...



There are some films that live long in the memory, worming their malevolent way into both your conscious and subconscious so that the slightest mention conjures up nightmare memories of hauntingly disturbing images. These films demand respect. They demand reverence. Takashi Miike's *Audition* is one such film. But why does a production that initially meanders so slowly as to be almost considered dull for nearly an hour of its running time, which then launches unrestrained into a visceral assault on the senses, warrant this attention? Why at a time when audiences are regularly subjected to increasingly unpleasant and questionable on-screen antics does *Audition* still retain a position rarely equalled in cinema, and almost never surpassed? Let's try and find out.

The best place to start is with the film's controversial director. Despite producing works across a great many genres, including more 'friendly' teen dramas and road movies, it is his penchant for including scenes of extreme violence and sexual perversion that

Miike is most renowned for. In the mid-to-late-1990s he released a series of extremely violent Yakuza films; his style and thematic preferences came to the fore in what became known as the Black Society Trilogy. There followed the epic *Dead Or Alive*, where the randomness of the perversity and violence is at its most notable, and as the new millennium dawned, Miike released his most famous film, the notorious *Ichi The Killer*. These films emphasise just how productive a period this was for Miike, but it is with 1999's *Audition* that his uncompromising creativity and dark sense of humour were most successfully combined.

As a film, *Audition* defies standard classification. Adapted from Ryu Murakami's novel of the same name, Miike begins his film with an opening act that is as protracted as it is hypnotically engaging. Apart from the occasional cryptic cut scene, this elongated act that lasts a full hour is in itself a test of commitment. Miike challenges the audience to persist with his film, slowing the pace to a point where it is difficult to





understand where the time goes. And yet go it does as the director skilfully weaves into his outwardly formulaic romantic melodrama barely imperceptible hints at the horror that is to follow. You know something is wrong, you're aware of a nagging feeling of impending discomfort, but the apparent blandness of what you are watching fights constantly to repress those feelings. Miike said he wanted his audience to empathise with the dull monotony of the different aspects of everyday life. Themes of family and the mundanity in the perceived lower levels of society are prevalent, strongly influenced by his early career apprenticeship with legendary Japanese filmmaker Shohei Imamura. It is into this blandness that Miike introduces Asami. Despite the gritty, realistic nature of the film, Asami appears almost spectral, emitting an aura of supernatural dread while portraying an innocent victim of a tragic life who is now desperate for warmth and reassurance.

This audition section, where we first meet Asami, is at the centre of the film and provides the lightest and most (darkly) comedic scenes while inspiring the main plot thread. Miike's films often return to themes of female suppression and their subsequent rebellion against man's control and *Audition* is no different. Widower Aoyama, still mourning the passing of his wife some years before, agrees in a moment of misguided desperation to hold fake auditions under the pretence of an available acting role. In truth, they are a way of vetting potential romantic opportunities, but when Asami walks in, Aoyama is bewitched. Despite warnings as to the vagaries of her past from best friend and co-conspirator Yoshikawa, Aoyama pursues Asami with a feverish passion.

While Asami's actions are ultimately horrific, they are fuelled by a sense of redressing the balance; in their simplest

form: a battle of the sexes. While Aoyama, with considerable initial encouragement from Yoshikawa, sees nothing wrong with the fake audition they have created to target potential romantic targets, it is primarily through a sense of blinkered right; a belief that what he is doing is perfectly natural for a Japanese man with the means to do so. Aoyama may not be a bad man, but he is not a wholly good one either and while his fate could never be justified, in Asami's eyes he is just like everyone else who has lied to and taken advantage of her.

While Miike would prefer to think of *Audition* as a romantic melodrama with female revenge fantasy overtones, for most viewers it is simply a horror film, and one with a lingering nastiness that lodges itself in your brain. Throughout, there are hints at what is to come; carefully planted clues as to Asami's true nature but even if you spot these, there is no way of predicting the horror that unfolds. As Aoyama desperately searches

for Asami later in the film, he discovers a trail of vengeance and retribution that sickens but does not discourage him. Only when he returns home, though, does the true ordeal begin. Drugged, he falls into a waking coma and through a series of hallucinations and reminiscences learns Asami's true past. The scenes that follow are the most strikingly memorable, and the most stomach churning.

Throughout *Audition*, there are cut scenes of Asami's seemingly squalid apartment, furnished with little other than a telephone and a brown hessian sack that moves from time to time. During his investigation, Aoyama is told by a passer-by of a murder victim cut into many small pieces. The story goes that when the police tried to assemble the victim, they discovered too many fingers alongside an extra ear and tongue. In the hessian sack, Aoyama discovers the previous owner of the extra appendages. As the bloodied and beaten man emerges from his fabric





prison, Asami vomits into a dog bowl before placing it in front of her captive. Desperate and hungry, the degraded man laps up the vomit, thus delivering a scene that will be etched on your retina. A rumour persists that Eihi Shiina, the actor playing Asami, was so involved in the role that she took method acting to a different level, actually vomiting into the bowl herself before presenting it to her fellow actor. While unconfirmed, if true, this does further add to the gruesomeness of the scene.

While under the influence of Asami's drug, Aoyama is given a further paralytic injection, one that will render him immobile and yet still able to feel the pain his attacker is about to inflict upon him. The scene is difficult to watch, as Asami inserts needles into Aoyama's body and eyelids before an excruciating moment that will forever be talked about. Strapping Aoyama down, Asami proceeds to use piano wire to gruesomely remove her victim's foot, before casually and callously throwing it aside. The knowledge that Aoyama is awake this whole time adds to the horror on screen, with the viewer forced into understanding his inability to prevent what is happening to him. This final attack, and the one *Audition* is most renowned for, amazingly almost never happened as Miike himself was unsure quite how far to take it. Ending the scene at the moment just before the removal of the foot was considered, but ultimately deemed lacking in impact. The removal of both feet was also considered, but while Asami begins work on the second, she is interrupted before she can finish. In the end, the scene is perfect in its horrific beauty, beguiling in a way that only the most terrible of scenes can be watched, as they often are, through fingers and from behind cushions.

In many ways, *Audition* is a cinematic masterpiece; a film that carries such weight of impact that seeing it just the once is enough to render it unforgettable.



Miike may have made over a hundred feature films, and many fans consider the striking and overwhelming violent *Ichi the Killer* as his greatest work. It is *Audition* though that is the film for which Miike is remembered. The combination of oppressive and carefully constructed blandness preceding scenes of callously delivered violence makes this a film deserving of the often hushed praise it receives. If you haven't seen *Audition*, then now is the time. If you have, the new release from Arrow Films is all the excuse you need to watch it again. And remember, it really is just a romantic melodrama. Honest.

+

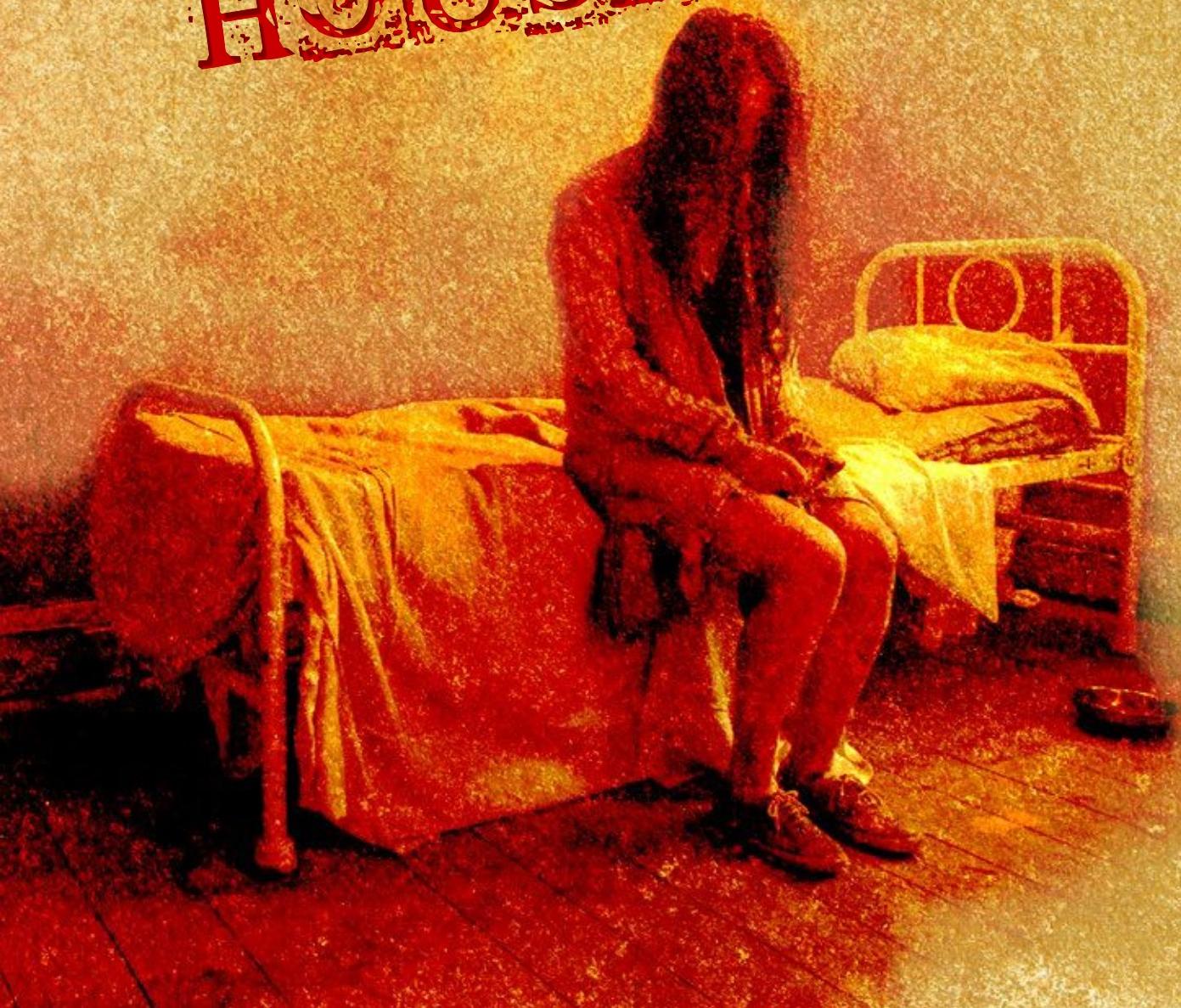
AUDITION is released in HD for the first time in the UK, on Blu-ray (and Steelbook), on February 29th.



HORROR
Obscura

This month, the miscreant Martin Unsworth highlights the first film from one of the best new directors on the scene at the moment...

THE SEASONING HOUSE





Paul Hyett has really burst onto the directing scene over the past year or so. 2015's *Howl* was lauded at festivals the world over and did rather well on its subsequent general release. His latest, *Heretiks* looks set to follow suit. Hyett began his cinematic career in special effects, working on such acclaimed films as *The Last Horror Movie* (2003), *The Descent* (2005), and *The Machine* (2013). However, his directorial débüt came in 2012 with *The Seasoning House*.

It's a harrowing story, based on the real-life places where young women are abducted and forced into prostitution. The film focuses on one such house in the war-torn Balkans, where roaming militia ransack villages, kidnapping the girls and killing those who get in the way. The titular house is a brothel run by a former member of one of these gangs, Viktor (Kevin Howarth). One of the girls brought to work for him (played by Rosie Day) is a deaf-mute, and has an unfortunate birthmark on her face. Thinking she'd not be desired by his regular clientele, but is too healthy and pretty to dispose of, Viktor takes her

under his wing and uses her to look after the girls. This can involve anything from cleaning up after the punters have had their terrible way (and as most of them are not in the slightest bit pleasant, many of the encounters end in the girls bloodied and bruised) to keeping the hapless 'workers' drugged up and compliant by giving them regular injections of heroin. Viktor names this girl Angel.

Alone and struggling to survive in a situation she has no control over, Angel discovers she can move freely around the house by utilising the crawlspace in the walls. It's through doing this that she strikes up a friendship with Vanya (Dominique Provost-Chalkley), who happens to know a little sign language which instantly gives Angel an outlet for all the feelings and emotions she has somehow managed to suppress. From the vents in the wall, she witnesses the horrific abuse of the girls, and when one of the visiting soldiers takes his 'pleasure' too far, resulting in the death of Vanya, she can stand it no more.

Climbing from the wall, she attacks the

naked brute of a man who has snuffed the life from her only vestige of humanity in the building. Unfortunately for Angel, this punter was a member of the militia who ransacked her home and brought her there in the first place, led by loud and nasty despot Goran (Sean Pertwee), who happens to have led the troops that slaughtered Angel's family and village. What follows is a nightmarish cat-and-mouse scenario, with the oppressor determined to kill the troublesome girl.

Although it seems such a simple set-up, and indeed, the basics of the story are laid in the regular rape-revenge scenario, Hyett's film manages to avoid falling into cliché and never once becomes exploitative of the subject matter. The situation feels as horrendous as it would be, and even in the scenes in which the captured girls are brutalised, there's never a hint of titillation or a moment where the viewer could possibly 'enjoy' what is happening on screen. This is a raw, nasty reality that is actually happening somewhere in the world right now. Sure, it's part of a film, which by definition, should be entertainment, but





the stark truth of the matter is certainly food for thought.

This contrasts with the final act, in which Angel is fleeing for her life, pursued by the evil Goran. She still gives as good as she gets, but it doesn't resort to over the top action bravado. She doesn't suddenly gain super-strength to bring down the bad guys who get in her way, or manage to become an expert marksman despite having never shot before. Angel is still fallible, still just a poor young girl fighting to survive against the odds. Likewise, the relationship she has with Viktor, who at one point promises to take her away from the place with him and who does try to protect her from Goran's men, isn't romanticised to the point where he is her saviour. She knows full well that he is using her as much as the soldiers use the drugged-up shells of the girls chained to the bedrooms. She's bright enough to play this to her advantage and give herself a slightly easier life. Angel is the strongest character we've seen in horror cinema for a while; a reluctant fighter whose desire to survive beats all the odds. And it's down to the amazing

work of Rosie Day that this is conveyed so wonderfully.

Viktor is convinced that he's a good guy. We can believe he genuinely wants to protect Angel and keep her with him, but at the same time, he's not averse to flexing his authority by callously slitting the throat of a girl just because he can. He seems to be purely out for himself; running the rat-infested brothel is a safer option than fighting with the militia, and he will do anything to keep his shamelessly selfish hide out of trouble. Actor Kevin Howarth explained that to get into the mindset of his character involved, "*a lot of homework, quiet contemplation; mutual creative decisions with the wonderful hair, make-up and costume women, more homework, more contemplation - and then focus*". With the nature and intensity of the role, we were curious as to how easy it was to leave the character at the end of a day's shoot; Kevin informed us: "*For me, it's not hard to switch off from the actual daily filming process and the technicalities that may have taken place in any one day on set,*

be they horrific or not. What remains with me is the focus - I can never really shake off the intrinsic qualities of who I'm playing, who my character is interacting with, his world and surroundings until I've actually wrapped on the whole film".

The film, by successfully conveying the true misery of the situation without any gloss, becomes a horror film in the very real sense of the term. War films can often be interpreted as such, particularly if they focus on the most unpleasant and distressing aspect - just try sitting through *Come and See* (1985) without flinching - and while *The Seasoning House* isn't a war film per se, it certainly sits in the same vein, yet is perfectly saleable to a horror audience. Without being preachy, its message hits home like a punch in the face. Atrocities are not just committed on the battlefield, but on the outskirts too, and there are always victims who will go unheeded.

Kevin Howarth, whose portrayal of Viktor is suitably menacing, agrees on the importance of approaching these





subjects, but with reservations about the use of the medium, telling us: "I believe cinema can always be a conduit in highlighting subject matters that are of vital importance, but I don't think that in itself, as an outlet, cinema is necessarily the best avenue for bringing attention to these types of atrocities. Visual media has become so accessible, through so many other platforms that information on real events is literally everywhere and in turn that has given birth to far more public awareness, commentary and, in a lot of cases, direct action. More people around the world watch television than ever go to the cinema or theatre and thankfully, we have superb documentary filmmakers and producers, working around the globe, who deal specifically with exposing these controversial issues - and more power to them. The reality is, if you want to highlight a particular situation and influence a mass audience, then that audience will be at home or on the Internet". He went on to corroborate the brutally real approach *The Seasoning House* takes: "I think it's important to point out that if any filmmaker chooses to capitalise on the raw realities of human

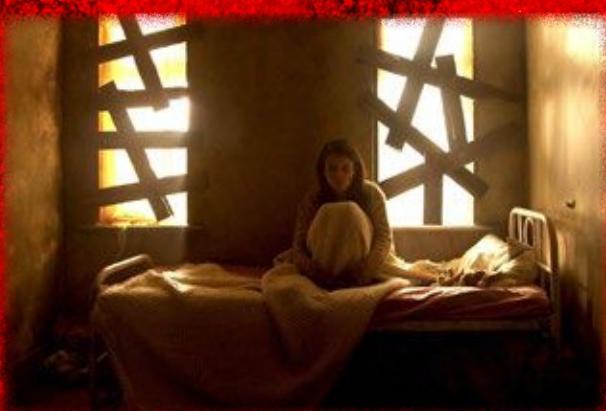
depravity then they have to be prepared to take a lot of flak if they cross that line between the reality and immediacy of that situation and what is perceived to be entertainment. They could also be in danger of trivialising a very serious subject matter if they do not treat that said subject matter with the utmost care, consideration and integrity."

But to fully understand the film, we asked Paul Hyett himself how the concept for the movie came about. "Mike Riley [producer] and I had spoken about doing a film together for years, and we discussed many ideas. I had been speaking with another writer, Helen Solomon, and she had an idea about sex trafficking; a young girl trapped in a brothel." He continued, "It was more of a docu-drama, but I had the idea of turning it into a horror thriller. I went away, did a whole bunch of research and wrote a 50-page script. I then pitched it to Templeheart Films and they loved it."

When we broached the subject matter and the real-life 'seasoning houses',

Paul was honest, "I didn't know a huge amount about them until I started doing the research. It was horrific to see this happens on such a huge level; wherever there is war, sex trafficking goes hand in hand, and even where there isn't war, sex slavery is still prevalent all over the globe, even now, in this day and time, it is a widespread problem - even in Europe. It's such a heartbreak issue; women suffer terribly in these environments." He also confirmed what we thought about his approach, "I never wanted to make anything exploitative, I was very upfront in the movie I was making, especially to the cast, and the financiers were totally supportive in the film I wanted to make. I think the fact it's based on so many real stories of real-life horrors that girls still suffer in this world at this time, to make something over-the-top or exploitative would have been wrong. Thankfully, most people (fans and critics) see it as a non-exploitative movie, which was a relief."

Considering the sombre tone of the film, the crew managed to get through with good spirits, even when things didn't quite





go the way they should, as Hyett explains, "The sudden snow enveloping the house halfway through the shoot was a concern, and Rosie Day accidentally setting her hair on fire, or accidentally piercing another actress with a heroin syringe, but it was actually a fun, enjoyable experience. Sometimes doing such dark subject matter can have an effect on set, but we were like a family, and very respectful of the story and victims we were portraying."

Filming took place mainly at the former RAF Uxbridge, which provided the movie with an authentic setting, as Kevin explains: "At the time, it was a derelict MOD site with all the ex-military homes and buildings standing empty. For the eponymous *Seasoning House* in the film, we used one of the larger buildings, which I believe was a children's school at one time, and the surrounding woods were utilised for a number of the exteriors". This piece of British military history provided its own atmosphere, "I went for a wander on my own around the old base and it was incredibly eerie, there was something very sad about it all - this place with so much history

just lying fallow. I gather it's now a new housing estate."

As mentioned, Hyett had spent many years at the business end of moviemaking, so having his first directing gig have its maiden screening at the country's premier horror festival was daunting: "It was the opening film of FrightFest 2012, and I was so nervous! But it went down well and went on to do very well at festivals and on DVD all over the world. So I was very happy and very relieved. And it's nice to see it still has a life, lots of people still talk about it, and it's great to see it actually have a television début, which I never expected."

For those sitting down to view the film for the first time when it does screen on TV, Paul has a serious message: "I'd love people to watch it with an open mind, especially considering that it was written to be a non-exploitative film, and to realise that these places exist, that real girls are suffering in these places, and I wanted to make a movie that would shake the viewers' emotions to the core, and to take them

on this journey into the darkest, most evil (and real) places in the world". Whereas Kevin has a more sobering recommendation, "Pour yourself a stiff drink and keep it by you throughout - *The Seasoning House* is a grim and uncomfortable ride".

A sentiment we can wholeheartedly endorse. It's a film that transcends its low budget roots; it is riveting and full of shocks but leaves the viewer in no doubt that the horrors that occur in the real world are far greater than anything depicted in the movies. It's a testament to Paul Hyett, Kevin Howarth, and the rest of the cast and crew that this is hammered home so convincingly. However, the top honours must go to Rosie Day, whose anguished performance is award-worthy. Had this been made by a loftier filmmaker, perhaps it would have been recognised as such. As it is, it's harrowing but rewarding viewing, and should not be missed.

Horror Channel can be found on Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, and Freesat 138.



LAUGH YOUR HEAD OFF...



OR WE'LL DO IT FOR YOU



BLOODY FUNNY FILMS
SATURDAYS AT 10.55PM IN MARCH

#LaughOrDie

hahahorror

horrorchannel.co.uk

NOT A NUMBER

Words: Tony Jones

Following on from our recent chat with NICK BRIGGS, STARBURST caught up with actor MARK ELSTOB to discuss his role as Number 6 in the Big Finish series of THE PRISONER.

STARBURST: We understand from Nick [Briggs, Big Finish Executive Producer and writer/director of the first box set] you are a big fan of the original *Prisoner* TV show. Can you remember when you first watched the show and how you reacted to it at the time?

Mark Elstob: I imagine the first time I actually saw it was when the series was repeated. Was that in the late seventies, or early eighties? One episode (*The Girl Who Was Death*) had been repeated earlier as part of some ITV celebration and I think Nick is a big fan of that particular story, but I must say it's not my favourite. The first time the programme registered in my consciousness was because of a book I had called *Fantastic Television*. It had articles and episode guides for a variety of fantasy TV shows and *The Prisoner* was included. Just reading the premise made it seem incredibly intriguing.

And were you ever in a fan club? Have you been to Portmeirion?

I was a member of the *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society as a boy, and I seem to recall one of the

issues of the fanzine [TARDIS] carried an advert for Six of One. At the time, I hadn't seen *The Prisoner*, but I'd heard of it and obviously, if the fan club was being advertised to members of the DWAS then that could only be a good thing! I've never been to Portmeirion, and would love the opportunity to visit. It's one of those real places which is lodged in my mind as a centre of fictional wonder – like 221B Baker Street or The Hundred Acre Wood.

What does the part of Number Six mean to you, and how did you come to get cast?

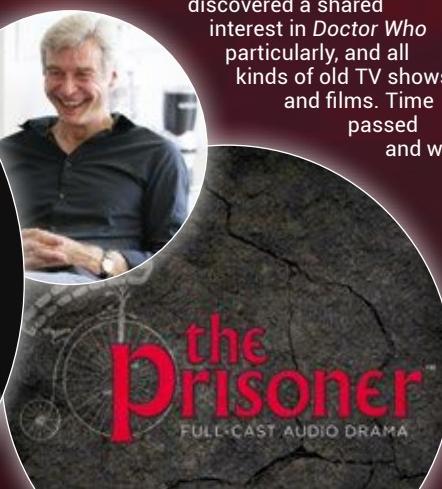
Number Six is a truly iconic character. Interestingly, given that the concept is all about the indefatigability of the individual spirit in the face of overwhelming opposition, the very anonymity of the label 'Number Six' allows the viewer (or listener) to identify with him because he has no identity of his own. In that sense, Number Six is a true archetype. I say this, by the way, with full awareness that Number Six might arguably be the same character from *Danger Man*... As regards casting, I had worked with Nick twenty years ago on a touring theatre production and we had very quickly discovered a shared interest in *Doctor Who* particularly, and all kinds of old TV shows and films. Time passed and we

bumped into each other about a year and a half ago. We had a very nice, relaxed and entertaining conversation (which isn't always the case when you meet an old acquaintance!) during which I almost certainly pitched myself for consideration in any Big Finish productions that might have been happening, then I thought no more about it. In January of this year, there was a lengthy exchange of emails in which he mentioned the project and asked if I was interested. I, naturally, could barely believe it and struggled to maintain my calm as we arranged to meet and discuss things. I look back and can clearly see that this meeting was part of the audition process, but at the time I was still a little giddy with excitement.

To what extent do you reflect Patrick McGoohan's delivery when performing as Number Six, and how much is you? Where do you draw the line between homage and re-interpretation?

Well, I've just listened to Episode One and my main concern (selfishly) was that I shouldn't sound like someone doing a poor impersonation of Patrick McGoohan, but rather someone who is speaking with their own voice, which just happens to sound like McGoohan's! A fine distinction, perhaps, but it seems to me crucial. And when I say McGoohan's voice, I refer not just to the timbre and tone, but also the intonation and rhythm. Part of Nick's job as the director would have been to monitor the actual sound I was making and try to prod me if I was going too wrong – or too slavishly right, I suppose! Where do I draw the line? That's a very difficult question, but I like Philip Hinchcliffe's answer (said in a different context): Where my experience and professional instinct tells me it should be drawn.

You've a lot of experience in theatre (including Shakespeare, Wilde, and Frayn),



have you much experience with radio? How did you find the studio experience?

I have absolutely no experience with radio. I've never appeared on radio since competing in a competition called the Carleton Hobbs at Drama School. My audio experience consists of just over twenty years as a reader of Talking Books for the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The studio experience of recording this series was great. In almost any endeavour, all we really want is for people to know what they're doing - all tasks are easier, aren't they, if you and your workmates are good at their job. The people at Big Finish are very good indeed at their job and that job is about more than pushing the right buttons at the right time (which is hard enough!). It's about generating a working atmosphere in which the actors are relaxed and comfortable. And keeping them well fed, obviously...

The Prisoner is trapped in 'The Village', and not only is there surveillance and any number of people who can't be trusted, but also a unique guard dog – Rover, the large white inflatable often sent to hunt down would be escapees. How was Rover recreated in studio? Apart from being a set of special effects, how did you approach the scenes where you were accosted by Rover?

Before recording began, Rover struck me as perhaps the most difficult concept to realise in a purely auditory way. It's such a simple yet powerful visual image. Listening to Episode One, in which we see (hear) Rover for the first time, I must say I would be hard put to improve on what the production team have done. Without wanting to give anything away, it's an artful combination of sound effects and the characters' reactions to what they see, or run from, or succumb to. As for the scenes where I am accosted by Rover (and in some scenes, I am VERY accosted by Rover!), I approached them in the same way as I approached every other scene, which is to say, I made it up! We're in a recording studio, remember, so we're having to imagine the Rover in the same way as we're having to imagine the Village, the Green Dome, the Stone Boat - everything, in fact.

Apart from The Village and Rover, each episode (the final pair aside, possibly!) is driven by the relationship between Number Six and the ever-changing Number Two. For the first box set, Number Two is played by John Standing, Celia Imrie, Ramon Tikaram, and Michael Cochrane; what can you share (without giving away any secrets) about each of these Number Twos? In real life, which of these would you find most daunting if you were in The Village?

John, Celia, Ramon, and Michael are all superb actors and perfect in their varied approaches to Number Two. If Nick will allow me to say, I found the first avuncular, the second authoritarian, the third measured and stately, and the fourth the granddaddy of them all! Each of them laced with the strange and occasionally

disturbing eccentricity for which the original show is so fondly remembered. In real life, I think I'd be most daunted by Celia Imrie. My blood still runs cold at the memory of her basilisk gaze over the top of the microphone...

And is there anyone else you'd like to meet in the role of Number Two? Which of the original 1960s Number Twos would you most like to appear against (were it possible)?

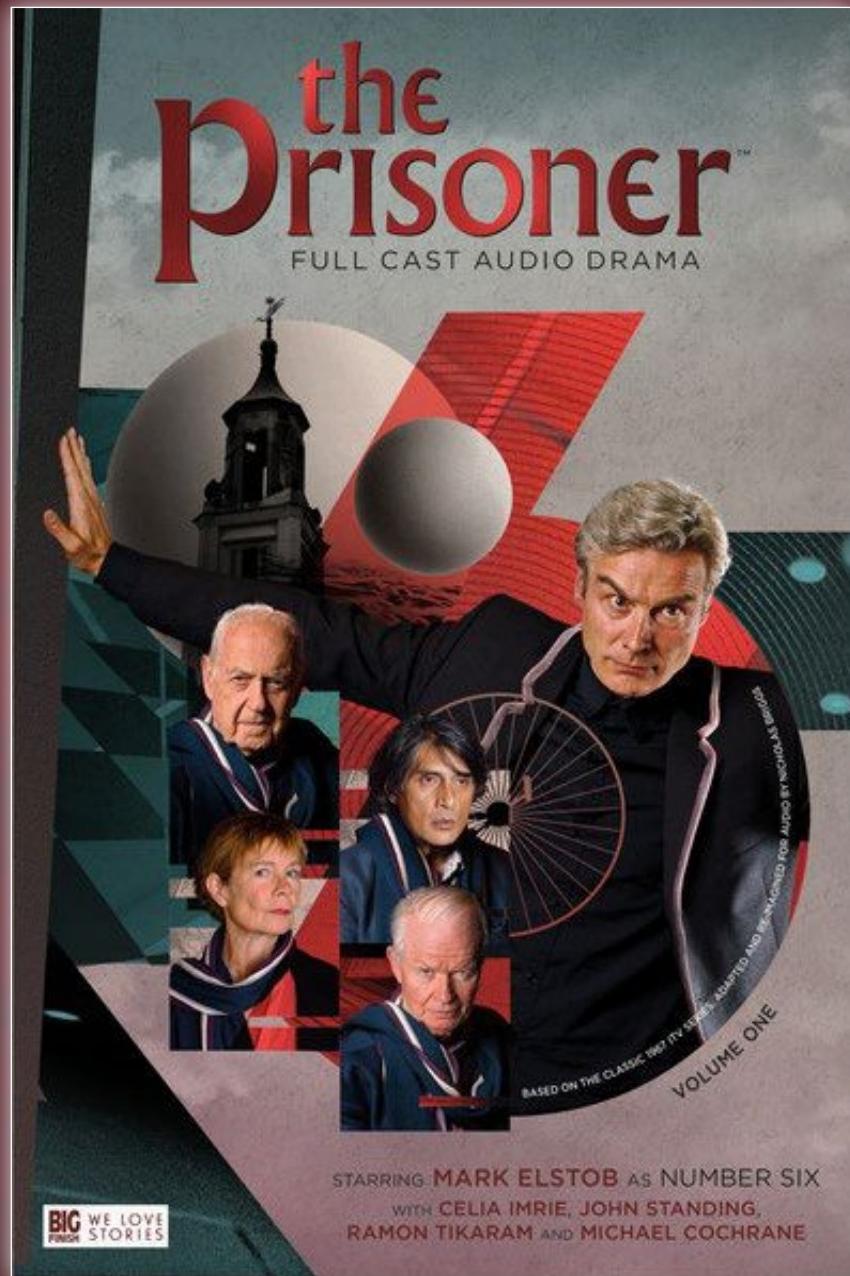
My personal favourite Number Two from the television series was Leo McKern, though I adore listening to Eric Portman's voice. Peter Wyngarde looms large in my television memories too. As for who I'd like to meet, well... that would be telling.

Finally, if you think back to the original TV series, what is your favourite story of all,

and has that changed through playing the part of Number Six? Have your feelings towards the show changed as a result of re-creating Number Six on audio?

My favourite episode was always and still is *Once Upon a Time*. It's the penultimate episode in which Number Two and Number Six share a bizarre psychodrama taking us (or not) through key events of Number Six's life. I love the intensity of the writing and the performing and the reliance on just the chemistry between the two leading actors. Doing this audio version of the show certainly hasn't changed that opinion and, indeed, has only deepened and enhanced my appreciation of everything that McGrohan and the original team were able to achieve.

THE PRISONER is out now and available from bigfinish.com. Be seeing you!



OF GODS AND MONSTERS

By Robert Martin

Can director ALEX PROYAS turn an ancient Egyptian myth into a modern day box office legend? STARBURST hopes for the best as we preview GODS OF EGYPT...



Ever since the time of *The Mummy* back in 1933, cinema audiences have been fascinated by tales of Egypt. Its rich mythology has provided a wealth of stories that, like those of ancient Greece, have brought some of the most fascinating and fantastic films to our screens. But like many genres, interest in them comes and goes.

Recent film forays back to the ancient mythological tales have met with mixed receptions. Films like *Clash of the Titans*, *Immortals* or even *Exodus: Gods and Kings* haven't really kickstarted a substantial revival in the sword and sandals movement as much as studio execs would have hoped for, with the rich seam of mythology ripe for movie

adaptations. Now, along comes the latest attempt to turn myths into the stuff of box office gold.

It's been seven years since Alex Proyas made a film, longer still since he made a good one. But the director of *Knowing*, *I, Robot* and *The Crow* has been busy helming his take on the myth of *The Contendings of Horus and Set*, which, fortunately for audiences and marketing people, has retitled to the snappier *Gods of Egypt*.

The story of two immortals battling for control over the land of the Pharaohs is a lavish production, its \$140 million budget bringing us a CGI-heavy mix of lush Egyptian cityscapes, bizarre monsters





(who knew ancient Egypt had giant horse-sized beetles wandering around?), flying gods, massive destruction, and Gerard Butler. Although no, the muscles aren't CGI.

Back on a *300*-like fitness regime for the role, Butler has piled on the beef again to portray Set, the baddy of the piece, who has usurped the throne of Egypt and cast the land into slavery and chaos. The blinded god Horus has other ideas and wants his throne back. So when he comes across a mortal determined to rid the land of Set and win back his true love, the two join forces. Along the way, the action shifts between mortal and immortal realms, with cast members Rufus Sewell and Geoffrey Rush adding some gravity to the inevitable ham.

You might have already read reports about the film. Like Ridley Scott's previously mentioned *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, the production came under fire because of its lack of Egyptian actors in any major roles. In any roles at all, in fact. The 'whitewashed' cast drew some flak when Lionsgate issued posters of the principal characters in November 2015; criticism further enhanced when they released the trailer. The controversy garnered a different response, however, to that of Scott, who claimed that his film would not have been financed without the star names of Christian Bale and Ben Kingsley (you may remember him portraying a famous Indian and winning an Oscar for his trouble in *Gandhi*), providing some box office draw. Arguably, only Gerard Butler counts as star power here, prompting the filmmakers to apologise for the lack of diversity in their cast. Both Proyas and Lionsgate said that they would strive for greater diversity in the future, a move subsequently welcomed by many who expected to get just more weak excuses. Whether or not the issue will impact on the film's appeal to audiences, only time and till receipts will tell.

So, beyond the lack of local (or, at least, authentic-looking) cast members, what do we think we'll get for our admission price?

Indeed, it looks like we'll see every dollar spent up there on the screen. Vast vistas, a CGI cast of thousands, crashing temples - it's going to be a visually spectacular movie as you'd expect from its director. Proyas has always delivered on action, too and there's plenty here, including the now ubiquitous ramping so that we'll get to see every splinter of Set's shattered shield fly at us in all of its slowmo 3D glory, a technique he used for some of the attack scenes in *I, Robot*. As Egypt falls and the gods call for monstrous, demonic help, it looks like all Duat (the ancient Egyptian equivalent of Hell) will be unleashed.

Having filmed in Australia throughout spring and summer in 2014, *Gods of Egypt* shares many cast and crew members with *Mad Max: Fury Road*, including some of the visual effects houses like Iloura, who have also worked on the likes of *Game of Thrones*. And if the first trailer contained a few slightly less than finished effects, doubts about their quality are erased by trailer number two, which shows much slicker production. The highlight is Butler bellowing "Come Demon!" as a multi-toothed worm mouth appears from the sky. That looks nasty if a little reminiscent of the beast from *Clash of the Titans*.

Trailer two also allows us to consider more about the cast. Geoffrey Rush, Best Actor Oscar winner for *Shine* back in 1996,



doesn't even get a look-in in the first one, but here, as the god of the sun, Ra, he gets to set the story up for us. Versatile Rush always brings a touch of class to proceedings, and you've got to love an actor who is as comfortable in award-bait roles in films like *The King's Speech* as he is chewing up the scenery in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise. In a movie clearly heavy on action and visuals, you need a couple of good performances if you're going to care. Neither trailer offers any sign of Rufus Sewell unless he's portraying a motion capture character, so we'll have to wait and see what his acting chops bring to the table. He made *Dark City* with Proyas, so let's hope their second collaboration is as good.

As the immortals themselves, Butler and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau of *Game of Thrones* look like they're having a great time battling it out. Buff Butler's committed performance was one of the reasons why *300* worked better than it may have, and he certainly brings an authentically threatening presence to his god, Set. When he says he will soon rule all the world, you kind of believe he could. The weight he brought to the line "This is Sparta!" before kicking that envoy into a deep dark pit in *300* was hefty, and he does quite a bit of 'shouty' commanding here, making him a villain we'll no doubt enjoy. Meanwhile, Coster-Waldau gets less chance to show us whether or not he can pull off the mixture of power and empathy his character will need to display if we're really going to root for him.

Which brings us to the mortals. When gods collide, and the future of an empire is at stake, you're going to need someone with courage, conviction, and solid acting chops to carry us along on the journey and help us identify with any human story amidst the carnage. Enter Brenton Thwaites



(*Maleficent*) as Bek, the mortal tasked with returning sight to Horus, getting back his enslaved love and joining forces with a God to return his beloved Egypt to its rightful leader. That's a lot to ask! Sadly, what we've seen so far has him coming across like he could do with a few more rounds in the gym with Butler and a few more classes in delivery from Rush. When he asks of Horus what he could be a god of, you expect that the answer might be Lynx body spray.

Of course, it's unfair to judge on the strength of a two-minute trailer what a character and the performance that delivers it will be like, so let's give Thwaites the benefit here and wait for the actual film before writing him off.

Owen Peterson is the production designer, and with credits as diverse as *The Matrix*, *Godzilla*, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* to his name, *Gods of Egypt* is going to look good, aided by crisp photography from Peter Menzies

Jr., who also photographed *Clash of the Titans*. Music is by Marco Beltrami, who has provided scores for many genre films, including *Scream*, *World War Z*, and *Hellboy* as well as Proyas' own *I, Robot* and *Knowing*.

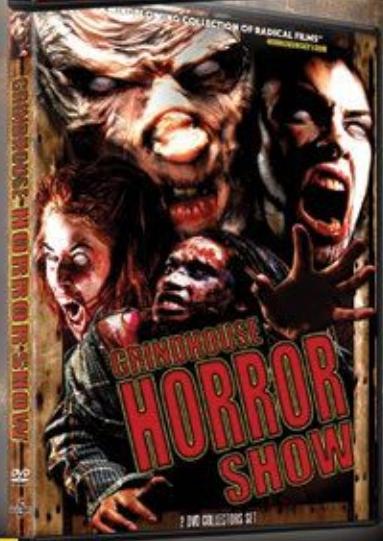
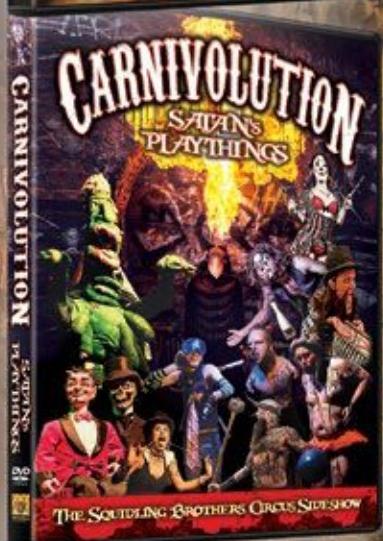
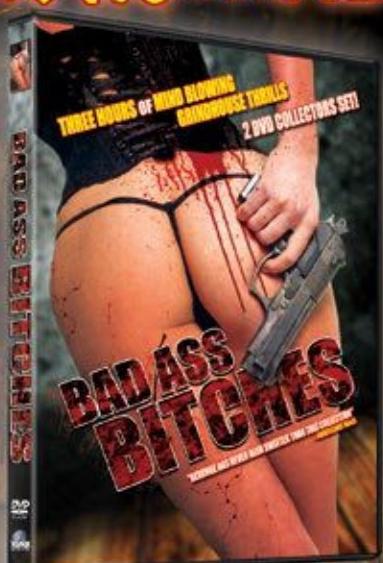
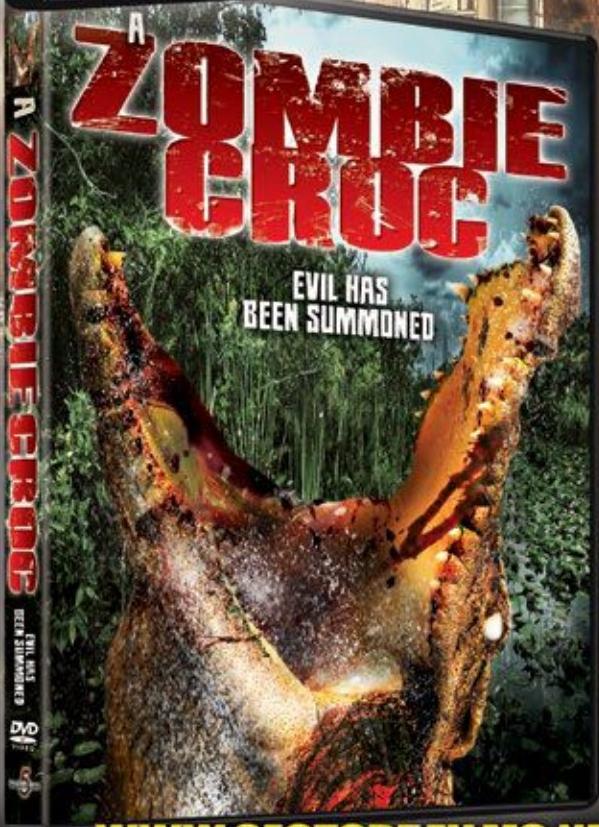
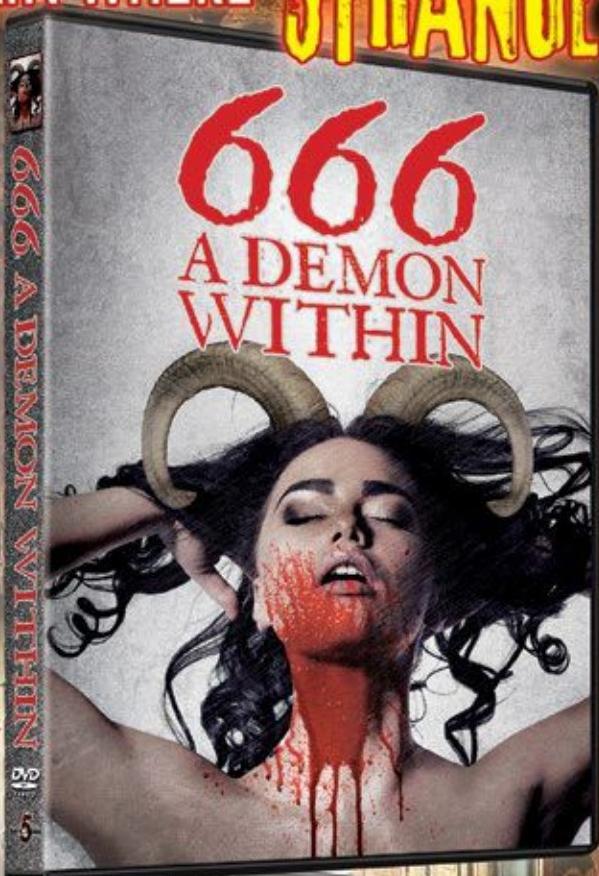
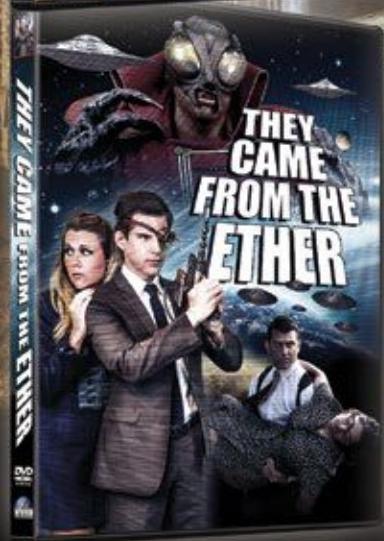
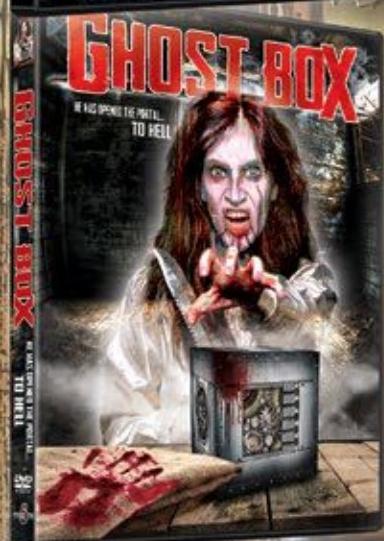
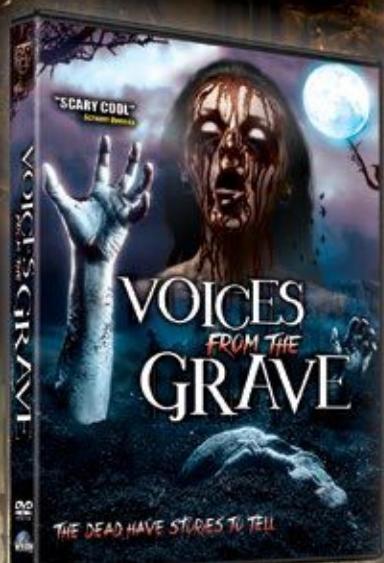
So, with a release in February, *Gods of Egypt* has a pedigree that should get your average genre fan's pulse pumping. It's about time we had Proyas back, even if *Knowing* got a mainly poor reception (although reviewer extraordinaire Roger Ebert said it was "among the best science fiction films I've seen"). And with *Ben-Hur*, from Timur Bekmambetov (*Night Watch*, *Wanted*) currently in post-production, maybe *Gods of Egypt* will give that kick to the ancient mythology subgenre producers are looking for.

Albeit a kick with a sandal.

GODS OF EGYPT hits cinemas on February 26th.



ENTER A DOMAIN WHERE **STRANGE IS NORMAL**



WWW.SECTOR5FILMS.NET

WWW.WORLDWIDEMULTIMEDIA.NET

WWW.REALITY-ENTERTAINMENT.COM

5
SECTOR

RE
Reality
entertainment

AMERICAN HORROR



LIFE'S A WITCH

STARBURST looks at
Robert Eggers' much
talked about chiller
THE WITCH...

BY JACK
BOTTOMLEY

Some have said that the nightmarish monster that is the horror genre has now become an overlooked and underappreciated aspect of modern cinema. Nevertheless, like the Devil himself, horror always finds a way of creeping back into our minds. In the beginning, it was campfire scary stories and folklore, and then it was ghouls and monsters before we had haunting motion pictures, followed by men in masks and modern-day gory torture porn. However, in these scary contemporary times, our greatest fears remain of a primal nature, and the fear of the unknown persists as one of the biggest anxieties of all. So with this said, perhaps it is high time we had a film that once again told a curious story of darkness, the malevolent forces that lurk within, and of 'proper' witchcraft.

In past centuries, nothing preyed on the minds of particularly highly religious communities as much as the idea of evil in human form. Witches are the personification of this, but where once they were frightening leading ladies or firmly engrained into terrifying tales, today the witch seems to be a watered down fantasy film accompaniment or underdeveloped villainous foil. Well, director Robert Eggers' new film aims to change all that and drag us kicking and (especially) screaming into the dark and lonely woods. *The Witch* (or *The VVITCH* as the posters would have it) is set back in 1630s New England, as William (Ralph Ineson) and Katherine (Kate Dickie) live on the verge of the wilderness. They lead Christian lives, tend to their farmland and look after their five children. However, when their newborn son vanishes, the

family is struck by a series of seemingly malicious events, which threaten their safety and sanity. Pre-dating the Salem witch trials of the 1690s by a few decades, this story promises to be less about warty-nosed, broomstick riding, cackling stereotypes and indeed less about the persecution of supposed ancient witches and more a bleak tale of early witchcraft paranoia and the creeping power of evil itself.

Everything we've seen so far is filled with ambiguous menace; *The Witch* is not your usual 17th century-set frightener. There is little in the way of fiery witch hunting or in-your-face brutality. Instead, the scares seem to trickle through an almost abstract collection of images that set up what is a simple narrative, but a promising one; one that looks intent to take refuge





in your head and refuse to leave. From bloody goat milking, disappearing children, ominous dialogue and Satan-like leaping black goats (apparently named Black Phillip), this is a film unafraid to toy with visual power, which might well suggest it will also take pleasure in making you see the world through its own corrupted and repulsive gaze. The taglines have read 'a New England Folktale' and 'Evil Takes Many Forms' and it appears that this is a movie very much indebted to the folklore that inspired genuine 17th-century fears.

Where most directorial débuts come with levelled expectations, the festival buzz generated thus far has turned what would be a small, low budget fable into one of the most anticipated genre offerings of 2016. American filmmaker Robert Eggers not only directs but also wrote the film, which despite having only a \$1 million budget, looks set to ensnare audiences on wide release as much as it did during its festival run. Eggers' background in production and art design in the short films that spanned his earlier career is clearly visible in a movie that already showcases some dark and expertly executed visuals. Already winning the Directing Award at the Sundance Film Festival last year, as well as numerous other accolades (including the Sutherland Award in the First Feature Competition at the London Film Festival),

this intense tale has caught the attention of many viewers, with some reviews already proclaiming the film as "*One of the most captivating and thought-provoking horror films in years*".

However, all too often, with any upcoming horror movie, or any film in general for that matter, it is all too easy to swallow the hyperbole and then leave the final product feeling dispirited. Yet, upon sitting through the pulse-quickenning footage that has thus far spellbound over 5 million views on distributor A24's official YouTube page, it is clear to see why the hype surrounds this film like a thick, sinister fog. The restrained and almost heart-shaking excerpts of a soundtrack (perhaps an early indicator of Mark Korven's entire score in the film) builds the tension before anything even occurs and the natural sounds of rumbling thunder, rustling hay, gunshots, caterwauling kids, bleating goats and birds in the distance add more atmosphere to the proceedings, as we get a quick insight into the story and characters. This film will be every bit about what you *don't* see as

it is about what you do and in a shorter, second trailer entitled 'paranoia' we get an indication of this, in the palm-sweating final moments (#RustlingintheHay).

The sequences of spooky-voiced children and dark, twisted woodlands are admittedly far from original, but Eggers looks not to re-invent the wheel but smooth it up, so it turns faster than ever for this new trip into a world of sins, a fractured family and the violating presence of evil. Jarin Blaschke's greyish cinematography is already startling and atmospheric, so we can only ponder what other sinister images and deceptive backdrops the film has in store for us. However, all this talk of the film's aesthetic early impressions should not distract from the impressive cast, who look to be fully invested in this compelling story.

The film stars the distinctively-voiced Ralph Ineson (*The Office*, *Game of Thrones*, the *Harry Potter* series, and more recently *Kingsman: The Secret Service*) as family patriarch William, who in many





senses has narrated the trailers thus far and his deep timbre spouting of religiously motivated dialogue is likely the backbone to this story of family and faith in the face of wickedness. Katie Dickie (*Game of Thrones*, *Prometheus*, and *For Those in Peril*) is his wife, Katherine, and likewise, will be equally pushed and punished by the unseen perils that mount in the film. Also sharing top billing with these two British stars is young Argentine-Anglo-American actress Anya Taylor-Joy (BBC series *Atlantis*), who portrays the couple's eldest daughter Thomasin, who could be a leading part of the dissension that looks to be going on in this family. The cast is rounded off by Julian Richings (*Man of Steel*, *War of the Worlds* TV series) as 'Governor' and younger cast members

Harvey Scrimshaw as Caleb, Ellie Grainger as Mercy, and Lucas Dawson as Jonas.

So as we edge closer to the release of this Canadian-American made horror, we feel ourselves shuffling nearer and nearer to the edge of our collective seats. If this film can burrow in the brain as well as the visually comparative (albeit altogether different) Ben Wheatley film *A Field in England* (also 17th century set) then we can consider ourselves in for a treat. We have yet to see the real meat of this story, but from the piercing eyes of goats and hares to the writhing agony of a family stricken by unforeseen malice, we can only imagine what else is yet to come. Hopes have been dashed before by hyped-up terror films, but all the evidence seems

to be pointing to a possible candidate for horror film of 2016 here. Whatever the case may be, it's clear that something wicked this way comes... and we can't wait to meet Black Phillip.

+



The Witch sends shivers through UK cinemas on March 11th.





by Ed Fortune

GERARD LOUGH

GERARD LOUGH is an Irish music video and movie director best known for working in genres such as horror and science fiction. His movies include an adaptation of Stephen King's **THE BOOGEYMAN**. We caught up with him to discuss his latest project **NIGHT PEOPLE**...



STARBURST: Why did you want to make this movie?

Gerard Lough: To escape what I call the 'first time director ghetto', the classic catch 22 where a director can't get hired to do a feature simply because they haven't done one before. The dialogue is usually 'I know you have done shorts and music videos, but you haven't done a feature yet'. Of course, I see the (albeit flawed) logic in that and understand it takes a very brave producer to back a talented director with only commercials to their name rather than a mediocre director with two movies under his belt. But the bigger reason is because nobody else has made a film quite like it yet. If they had, I'd happily take the simpler option of buying a ticket to see it.

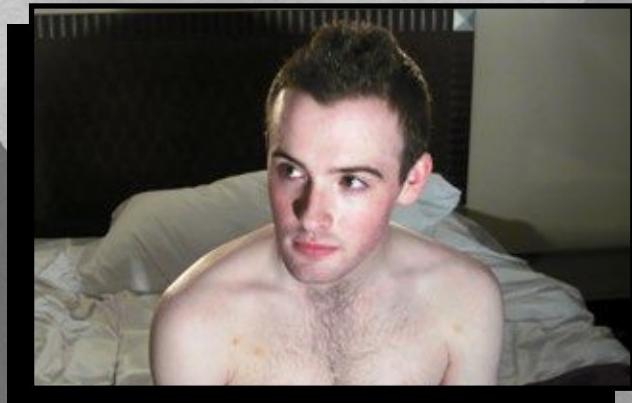
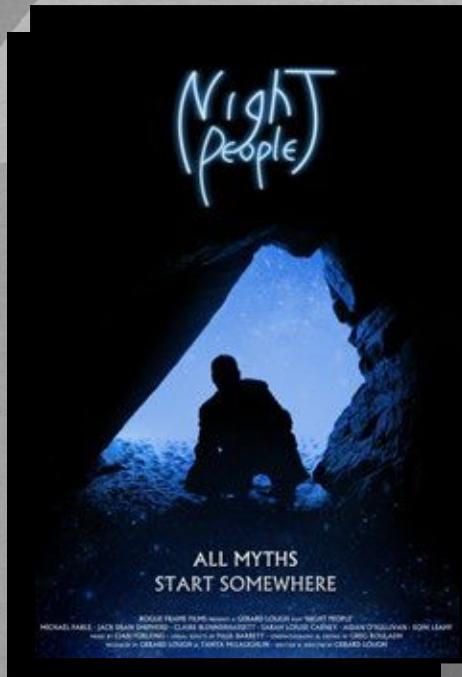
Why did you pick 'Night People' as the subject matter?

Dark, unusual and extreme people are interesting to me, although at arm's length would be preferable. When I would be staying the night in the city and couldn't sleep, I would poke my head outside the window to watch the activity on the streets below and there they would be - Night People. Being a creative type, I could never help, but imagine stories to go with these individuals whose strange and dramatic lives called for them to up at that time doing whatever it was they were doing. Needless to say, a lot of them are out there for reasons other than working a night shift. Besides, an outsider will always be a hell of a lot more interesting than a well-adjusted, popular guy.

Why make it an anthology?

It's not an anthology film, but it's a very common mistake for people to make. It's actually a hyperlink story or an intertwining narrative like *Cloud Atlas* or *Traffic*. In a nutshell, the movie does split up into three different plot strands but it shares characters, themes, and locations with each other and then they all intersect at the end to become one big story. I honestly think of *Night People* as one story. Anthology films such as *Cat's Eye* are completely separate stories connected only by some kind of framing device.

NIGHT PEOPLE



The framing device of the two arsonists talking is quite unusual. What made you go for that?

From a practical standpoint, it allowed the start of principal photography to be a little easier on myself by having one of the stories all contained within one interior location - a vacant house in this case. The other two stories took me all over the bloody country from everywhere from a nightclub to a waste-ground at 2am. Thematically, it let me tick the boxes of things I wanted to do in a movie such have a story take place all in one night, use the unreliable narrator technique and explore ideas such as 'can a place where something wicked occurred leave behind a trace of that event that some people will sense as soon as they enter?'

How did you get the movie funded?

I'm very proud to say it is all self-funded - completely independent. It's a big added stress, but on the plus side you can do what the hell you like... as long as it's within your budget. None of that crowd funding bullshit either. Asking the general public to finance your art? Bit of a cheek, if you ask me. I did try the usual channels for getting backing, but there is only so many times you can listen to the response, 'Yes, but it's not really a horror film, is it?' or 'It's very original, interesting and unusual, so it's not for us'.

How is the indie move scene in Ireland? Is it growing?

I don't know if it's growing because the pattern here (as is the U.K.) is usually

a case of as soon as a director really breaks out they get snapped up by Hollywood so they have to go where the work is and move sticks. I do know there is the beginnings of what some in the media are calling an 'Irish New Wave'. Which is, far as I can see, a bunch of filmmakers like myself, guys who grew up on a steady diet of '80s genre cinema and now want to make commercial sci-fi/horror/fantasy films of our own. Do I want to make a film about the troubles in Northern Ireland or a gritty drama about a disillusioned petrol pump attendant with a depressed budgie? Fuck no! I want to make something as stylish as *The Hunger*, as scary as *Hellraiser* and as well-crafted as *The Shining*. If those three films all got it on with each other,



I suppose *Night People* would be their unholy offspring.

What tips do you have for other indie moviemakers?

Music videos and commercials are great experience for sharpening your visual skills, but you'd be foolish not to take the time to make some short films, which is where you will gain first-hand experience in the most important two areas: working with actors and telling a coherent story. Don't be in such a hurry to make a feature before you are 30 and be hailed as a wunderkind. Even if that happens, it's a double-edged sword that has cut short your career equally fast. And while you are at it, skip college or any third level education being taught by anyone who hasn't actually made a film themselves

because their wisdom will be about as useful as driving lessons from someone who never got behind the wheel of a car. You probably have a computer, so all you need now is a DSLR and a boom. Hey presto, you are now officially a filmmaker and nobody can say any different. Don't know anything about French New Wave or Orson Welles and don't much care either because all you're interested in is *Blade Runner* and *Alien*? No problem, stay that way and don't apologise for it. Just stay away from crowdfunding, kids!

Can we expect more stories about 'Night People'?

I haven't given it serious thought as I'd like to do something different and besides, given what goes down at the climax of

Night People, continuing the story gives me a migraine just thinking about it.

What's next for you?

I would very much like to do a story that takes place during the New Romantic scene of London 1981. We have had loads of Punk films, time for a New Wave one! But before that, I have to concentrate on the final hurdle of the filmmaking process - releasing the film and hoping for a warm reception. You can pretend to be the cool, arty outsider all you want, but everyone wants acceptance sooner or later. The characters in my film might disagree, though.

Follow the film on facebook.com/nightpeoplefilm



NIGHT PEOPLE

NIGHT PEOPLE / CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GERARD LOUGH / STARRING: MICHAEL PARLE, JACK DEAN-SHEPHERD, CLAIRE BLENNERHASSETT, SARAH LOUISE CARNEY / RELEASE DATE: TBC

There are some outstanding independent movies coming out of Ireland, and many of them are super low-budget affairs. *Night People* is an old fashioned multi-storied movie that's essentially two small features stitched together with a single narrative.

Rather than having some sort of horrid ghoul presenting the stories, the framing device for *Night People* is two professional criminals chatting away as they wait for the go-ahead to burn down the house they've broken into. It's certainly an original premise and it immediately establishes tension and countdown to the film.

The first story is about a mysterious artefact that gets discovered by a wannabe business man. Convinced that the weird object can be used for profit, he hands it over to a scientist friend who eventually declares that they're both in over their head. As their relationship strains under the pressure to find out what the damned thing is good for, things begin to go wrong. It's quite the slow burner of a story, but that suits the Lovecraftian nature of the tale quite well. The performances are okay and the direction is limited, but it does the job quite well.

The second story is stronger here, concerning people who work after hours. The main character is a sex worker looking for a way out of her current situation who ends up working for some very unusual people. The pace is slow and steady, and though it isn't anything terribly special, the characterisation is very well done, with a great performance from Claire Blennerhassett.

Night People could have easily been a shorter movie, and they could have easily trimmed it enough to squeeze in another story. The various plot elements could have been tighter and the various twists given more emphasis. Despite these flaws, though, it's a good indie horror and we hope to see more.



STARBURST

RADIO

**The official radio show
for Starburst Magazine**

**Hang out with the Starburst team
LIVE every Wednesday on
Fab Radio International
9pm until 11pm**



RADIO
INTERNATIONAL.COM



Available on
iTunes

WWW.FABRADIOINTERNATIONAL.COM

THE MULTI- LAYERED STORY

By Samantha Ward

It's a book that has been mooted for cinematic treatment for decades but can BEN WHEATLEY bring what's needed to HIGH-RISE?

British director Ben Wheatley has a knack for fusing dark comedy with a little extra helping of despair and corruption. You could even say he has become a master of this mixed genre. His previous feature films, *Down Terrace* (2009), *Kill List* (2011), *Sightseers* (2012), and *A Field In England* (2013), are all unique in their own right, but each of them represent human desperation in a rather sinister yet odd and charming manner, that we all know to be British humour. The latest project for Wheatley is *High-Rise*, a sci-fi/drama based on the 1975 novel by J. G. Ballard. After its world premiere at Toronto Film Festival, it soon got picked up by various distributors around the world; lauded with critical acclaim for its dark humour. *High-Rise* presents itself to be Wheatley's biggest budget film yet with an all-star cast and great production values. Tom Hiddleston takes on the starring role alongside Sienna Miller and Jeremy Irons. The story seems to be right up Wheatley's street, as it deals with dark and disturbing corners of the human psyche.

Set in an idealistic and semi-futuristic (at the time of the novel's release, anyway) London in 1975, *High-Rise* is a luxury tower block complex created by architect Anthony Royal (Jeremy Irons), who is also a resident with his own lush gardens. The imposing building boasts extravagant apartments with every amenity needed from supermarkets to a gym, and it even has a built-in school. It's a utopian bubble cut off from the rest of society. When a young doctor, Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston) moves in, he is seduced by the frivolity of the high class. However, he soon comes to realise the quite literal divide between those that live in the lower, middle, and upper levels. This knowledge causes discord and revolt among the residents. Cracks start to appear in this once idyllic world as tribes gather and join forces to survive a class war. Sienna Miller

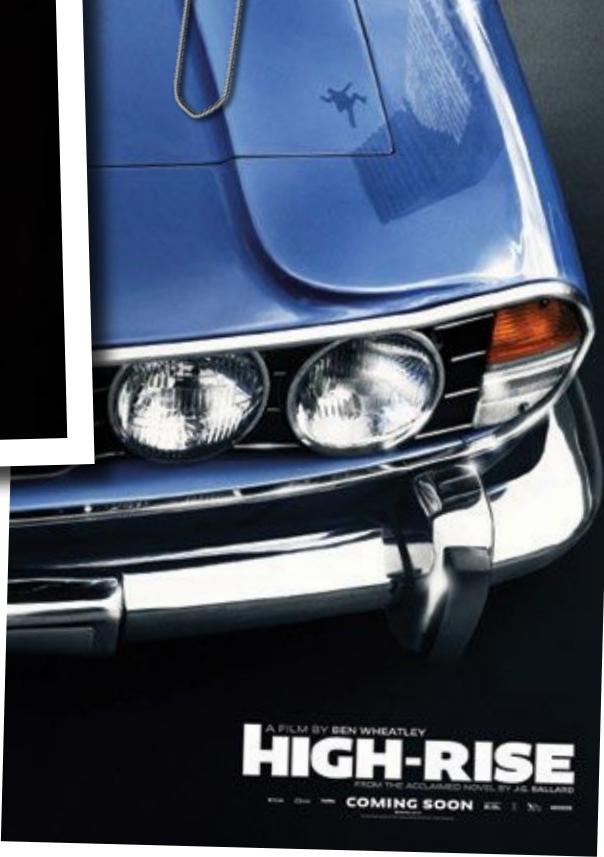




is a prodigy of Royal's and a love interest for Laing. Laing befriends Richard Wilder, played by Luke Evans, a lower-class journalist set to shake up the place with the injustice of the class divisions. The plot is very much reminiscent of Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer*, although, at least this time, we'll actually get to watch *High-Rise* on British soil.

James Graham Ballard was an English novelist and short story writer associated with the New Wave of Science Fiction of the sixties. Ballard's work presented distinctive themes of dystopian modernity; his technological and psychological issues would be described as Ballardian (you can look that up in the Collins English dictionary if you wish). It's been cited that *High-Rise* influenced a *Doctor Who* serial, *Paradise Towers* starring Sylvester McCoy, from the twenty-fourth series. Incidentally, Wheatley has directed a couple of episodes for the revived *Doctor Who* in Series Eight, showing he has a love for the sci-fi genre, and British sci-fi more specifically. Having mostly dabbled in horror/comedy, it is now apparent Wheatley is expanding his talents in his forays into the science fiction genre with exciting new technologies. *High-Rise* can be described as a very dark novel, so it seems to be a match made in heaven. It's no surprise that Wheatley would find himself directing this one with his current credentials. However, there is no doubt he will bring his own ideas to the story to ramp it up for the big screen.

Producer Jeremy Thomas (*Only Lovers Left Alive*), being a fan and friend of the late author, has been eager to adapt *High-Rise* into a feature film for quite a few decades now. Clearly it was bad timing and just wasn't meant to be after previous attempts, with directors Nicolas Roeg and Vincenzo Natali attached at various points, regrettably failed due to financing or unlucky collaboration experiences. Thomas did, however, manage to produce *Crash*, an adaptation of Ballard's most controversial novel in 1996, directed by David Cronenberg. In 2013, Ben Wheatley's interest in the story led him to Thomas when he searched for the rights to the book. A fan



of both the author and Thomas' films, Wheatley was happy to jump on board, feeling the story is just as relevant now as it was in the seventies, particularly with the evolution of technology and the want of convenience. Keeping it true to the Wheatley style, screenwriter Amy Jump started writing the adaptation, then soon after, with Thomas's connection, Hiddleston was announced to star, beginning a buzz of excitement among fans of both the novel and Wheatley's directing.

Although *High-Rise* is not a hugely anticipated feature in the mainstream, it has to be said that they have been particularly clever in marketing this film.

Wheatley kicked off his career producing viral ads on the Internet; now it seems he's put that talent to good use with *High-Rise*, implementing a viral pun within the extended trailer. They've turned it into an advertisement for the building as if it was a real complex. Tom Hiddleston's captivating voice narrates the whole trailer and finishes off with a soothing 'Join Us'



at the end of the trailer. Underneath that there is a website about the tower block (www.anthonroyalarchitecture.com), a site you can actually visit. Unfortunately, there isn't much to the site other than a rather bland one-page campaign that eventually leads you to the *High-Rise* Twitter page. You can appreciate the idea, though, especially with the clean look of it making the film feel more sinister; you almost feel the cold corporation attempting to brainwash you. This befits the themes of the movie as it's not all sunshine and daisies when the apartment building is to become a chaotic war zone caused by an animalistic need to establish authority. The absolute opposite of the utopia Laing first thought it to be, then.

Wheatley has a somewhat experimental technique for shooting his films, with his previous features shot very differently for different purposes. *High-Rise* appears to be his tidiest film yet and with a bigger budget, we should expect more dramatic and cleaner shots. A lot is going on: more colour, more action, and more drama; perhaps more than Wheatley has ever dealt with before being the low-budget cult maven he is today. The period alone gives the film a vibrancy and intensity that puts the film on a grander scale when compared to the darker and more drained look of, let's say, *A Field in England*.

Wheatley was attracted to the seventies for various reasons; from childhood nostalgia to the ideals of the time. He decided to set the film during the period that the novel was published because he felt that the seventies "had a real idea of what the future was going to be like, and it was much more stylish". We can't really argue with that. So we could



be in for a spectacular treat, something reminiscent of the cyberpunk movement and post-apocalyptic action films, although with a lot more sophistication and eloquent filming techniques. We haven't had a great tower block movie in a few years; remember that mini-boom that made its way to the big screen, which included *Dredd*, directed by Pete Travis, Gareth Evans' *The Raid*, and the crazy alien Brit film from Joe Cornish, *Attack the Block*? It may just be the

perfect time to add yet another. Like those three mentioned, Wheatley may not be a big-time Hollywood director, but we can trust his integrity to entertain us with style, plus he seems to have all the freedom to experiment and do whatever the hell he wants. It all looks rather promising that Wheatley will deliver the right combination of horrific brutality and dark humour. +

HIGH-RISE is released in UK cinemas on March 18th.



REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



DEADPOOL

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TIM MILLER / SCREENPLAY: RHETT REESE, PAUL WERNICK / STARRING: RYAN REYNOLDS, MORENA BACCARIN, ED SKREIN, T. J. MILLER, GINA CARANO, BRIANNA HILDEBRAND, LESLIE UGGAMS, JED REES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Deadpool fans (and Marvel fans)... you can finally breathe a sigh of relief. 20th Century Fox haven't messed up Deadpool a second time.

After a simply awful big screen début in X-Men Origins: Wolverine, a couple of years trapped in development hell, a leaked screen test that seemed so right and an inspired, 'too good to be true' marketing campaign, Deadpool the movie delivers... in bloody spades.

Already sporting his natty red suit, mask, Wolverine-style 'healing factor' and horrific scars from head to toe at the film's start, Deadpool the film relates Wade Wilson's (Ryan Reynolds) quest for revenge against the man who tortured and disfigured him while explaining how he became Marvel's Merc with a Mouth in nice, bite-sized, chunks.

Along the way, he banters with taxi drivers, tries to get Colossus and Negasonic Teenage Warhead from the X-Men to leave him alone, shares his preferences when it comes to Ikea furniture, and attempts to keep an old flame safe from a nasty enemy.

If all this sounds a little light on plot, it's because it is. But this is more

than made up for by the almost perfect combination of horrible ultra-violence and coarse jokes visited on the bad guys by Reynolds as Deadpool.

Based upon the trailers, Deadpool was always going to be funny, but what's truly surprising is that just how funny it is. Yes, there are jokes every 0.05 seconds, but a ridiculously high percentage of them land, from the in-joke packed opening credit sequence, all the way to the post-credit sting.

If there was one worry going into this movie, it was that all the funniest parts would be in the trailers; but the filmmakers improve each trailer moment by adding an unexpected gag directly before or after it. Under the mask, Reynolds' performance is, as fans had always hoped, perfect. His nonstop delivery and manic clowning carries the movie, impressive since his face is hidden under the mask.

All the trappings of comic book Deadpool are present too; most notably the constant quipping and breaking of the fourth wall, although rather than referring to issue numbers and comics creators, here it takes the form of incessant references

to Wolverine (and Hugh Jackman), the affordability of cameos from big-name actors from the X-Men franchise, fast forwarding the plot and moving the camera at 'private' moments.

Characters such as Blind Al and Weasel survive the transition from page to screen startlingly well and Sister Margaret's School for Wayward Children even makes an appearance.

On the other hand, the car chase featured in those trailers (and the leaked test footage that resulted in the film getting made) does take up quite a bit of the film's running time, that laser focused plot can make the story feel a tad small and despite its structure, Deadpool is still just an origin movie, but it's a very crude, very violent and very, very, very funny, one.

Relax, True Believers, Daddy Deadpool's home...
Just don't watch it with your parents.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★★ 9



BONE TOMAHAWK

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: S. CRAIG ZAHLER / STARRING: KURT RUSSELL, RICHARD JENKINS, PATRICK WILSON, LILLI SIMMONS, MATTHEW FOX / RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 19TH

Cowboys versus cannibals in the Old West, with Kurt Russell rocking the best beard since his majestic facial hair work in *The Thing*. A cross between *The Searchers* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, S. Craig Zahler's ambitious genre bender is a Western, black comedy and gory horror movie, all at once and entirely successfully.

When members of his community (plus some horses) are kidnapped by a tribe of vicious cave-dwelling cannibals, tough Sheriff Franklin Hunt (Russell) assembles a small posse to give chase. There's dim-witted backup deputy Chicory (the ever-reliable Richard Jenkins), dandy poser and braggart John Brooder (Matthew Fox, giving good 'Jackface') and cowboy Arthur O'Dwyer (Patrick Wilson), nursing a grievously injured leg. That's a strong cast, and *Bone Tomahawk*'s strongest suit is the interplay between the men, bickering, bonding and banter-ing (sorry) as they go. Never mind the cannibals, it's truly engaging well before the horror elements properly kick in.

That's not even counting the cameos from David Arquette (strengthening the Ravenous vibes it already gives off) and Sid Haig, setting the tone early as they stumble across a cannibal burial ground. At 132 minutes, *Bone Tomahawk* is a hefty commitment,

but that time spent with its characters does mean that we come to deeply care about the men and genuinely worry for their well-being once cannibal territory is entered. No punches are pulled in depicting the man-eaters' grisly atrocities (think *Predator* meets the creatures of *The Descent*), packing in the most brutal kill sequence we've seen in years. It recalls *The Green Inferno*, only far more effective than that, thanks to its placement in a film that is vastly superior to the silly hot garbage that is *The Green Inferno*.

Special recognition must go to Richard Jenkins, quietly stealing the show as the town idiot with a heart of gold and a surprising level of competence when necessary – his interactions with Fox's Brooder are a particular joy, with the latter giving the best performance of his career (his ridiculous turn in *Alex Cross* notwithstanding). It's a close call picking out favourites though, in a film as tightly cast and acted as this.

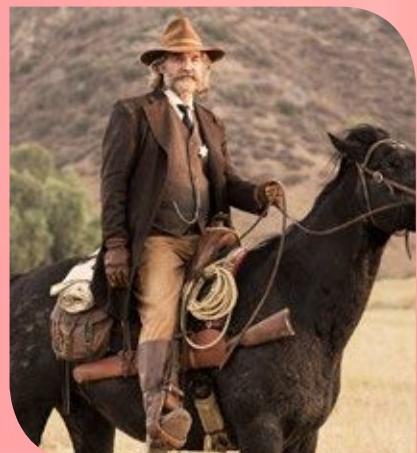
Slight niggles resound during the finale, when gunshots can be heard from either miles away or not at all, depending on whether or not the story requires a surprise entrance for one of its characters. The lack of budget and/or refusal to play up its B-movie roots all the way also means that there's not as

much bombast to the finale as one might like – it's gory, violent, and action-packed, but there's a sense that it could have done more and gone even further. That's just greed talking, though – thankfully, there's already plenty of *Bone Tomahawk* to go around. Yeehaw!

JOEL HARLEY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 9





THE 5TH WAVE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: J BLAKESON / SCREENPLAY: SUSANNAH GRANT, AKIVA GOLDSMAN, JEFF PINKNER / STARRING CHLOË GRACE MORETZ, NICK ROBINSON, RON LIVINGSTON, MAGGIE SIFF, ALEX ROE, LIEV SCHREIBER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With The Hunger Games series having reached the finishing line, the Divergent/Allegiant/Detergent (must look that one up) trilogy drifting towards its conclusion and The Maze Runner.... err... running out of steam, it's no great surprise to find that Hollywood has been casting a lascivious eye over the bookshelves of our more hormonal teens and decided that Rick Yancey's alien invasion trilogy (only two titles of which have been released so far) deserves the big screen treatment. Fair enough. The 5th Wave is a decent book, a bit edgier than many of its type, but this slightly bland adaptation does it few favours and largely fails to capture its grittiness and disquieting sense of the genuinely apocalyptic.

Chloë Grace Moretz plays young Cassie Sullivan, orphaned in the aftermath of an alien invasion that has struck in five distinct waves; an electromagnetic pulse shuts down the power, earthquakes and tidal waves devastate the cities, a virulent avian virus wipes out many survivors, alien snipers pick off others, and finally the aliens manage to take over human bodies, making it virtually impossible for them to be distinguishable from humans themselves. Cassie sets off to rescue her younger brother Sam, taken by the military to be trained into a crack resistance force apparently consisting entirely of tots and teenagers, but is injured and finds herself falling in with the brooding, mysterious woods-dwelling

Evan Walker (Roe). Inevitably, young hormones do what they will do, but Evan isn't quite who he seems and neither, for that matter, are the military as they send their miniature warriors into battle.

This is all well and good and there's nothing much wrong here. But the film's pace and tone are all over the place. The big set pieces are front-loaded into the first twenty minutes of the film and we don't see a great deal of the carnage the aliens cause as their subsequent 'waves' pummel the Earth. The film seems to be in a rush to set out its post-invasion stall and we're left with a film which places its emphasis on Cassie mooning over Evan (the scene where she virtually flutters her eyelashes on seeing him taking a topless wash in a lake can only elicit sniggers from the audience) and scenes which evoke unwanted memories of the lifeless Ender's Game as the military-enlisted kids are trained for battle. The energy level starts to rise again in the last reel but we're still just left with scenes of teenagers running around with machine guns, a few perfunctory explosions and a story that, by the nature of its source material, remains frustratingly open-ended come the credits.

The 5th Wave certainly isn't fifth rate - Moretz acquits herself well as the no-nonsense Cassie, forced to grow up quickly in terrible circumstances - but it never shifts out of first gear and doesn't really possess that indefinable something

that powers the very best and most successful YA series. Budgeted at around \$40 million, it'll probably turn a minor worldwide Box Office profit but its poor opening weekend stateside suggests we can probably wave bye-bye to any hope of seeing the rest of the trilogy on screen anytime soon.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 6





ROOM

CERT:15 / DIRECTOR: LENNY ABRAHAMSON / SCREENPLAY: EMMA DONOGHUE / STARRING: BRIE LARSON, JACOB TREMBLAY, SEAN BRIDGERS, WENDY CREWSON, WILLIAM H. MACY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Five-year-old Jack lives in Room with his ma. He's always lived in Room with his Ma. It's the only world he knows. It's the only world that exists. Sometimes Old Nick comes into Room in the night when Jack is sleeping - or pretending to sleep - in the wardrobe and interferes with Ma. But usually, it's just Jack and Ma together in Room, living their lives and having fun...

Beautifully and sensitively adapted by Emma Donoghue from her best-selling novel, Room superficially tells the uncomfortable, stifling story of a young woman kept prisoner, locked up in a cramped, dingy, barely habitable shed for seven years and repeatedly raped by her abductee. It's into this grim, unnatural world that Jack has been born and whilst his mother is devoted to him and does everything within her power to protect him and educate him, she's becoming increasingly aware of the psychological straitjacket being woven around the naive, lively child. Clearly, their terrible nightmare dilemma has to end... but how to outwit the wretched Nick, who keeps them secure and isolated in a garden hellhole? And how will Jack react if and when he discovers that the world doesn't begin and end in Room? It's hard to define exactly what

Room is and that alone is one of its many strengths. Initially, it's a thriller, albeit one that resonates uncomfortably with real-life events (one of which inspired Donoghue's novel) we're all too familiar with from often lurid press reports; the shocking squalor of Ma and Jack's situation sometimes

makes Room a difficult watch, as if we're peeking at a world too terrible to imagine. But whilst the film changes direction after about an hour - here it's genuinely edge-of-the-seat stuff - it's never less than utterly absorbing and engrossing and we feel Jack and Ma's elation even as we quickly sense that there may be dark and troubling times ahead for both of them.

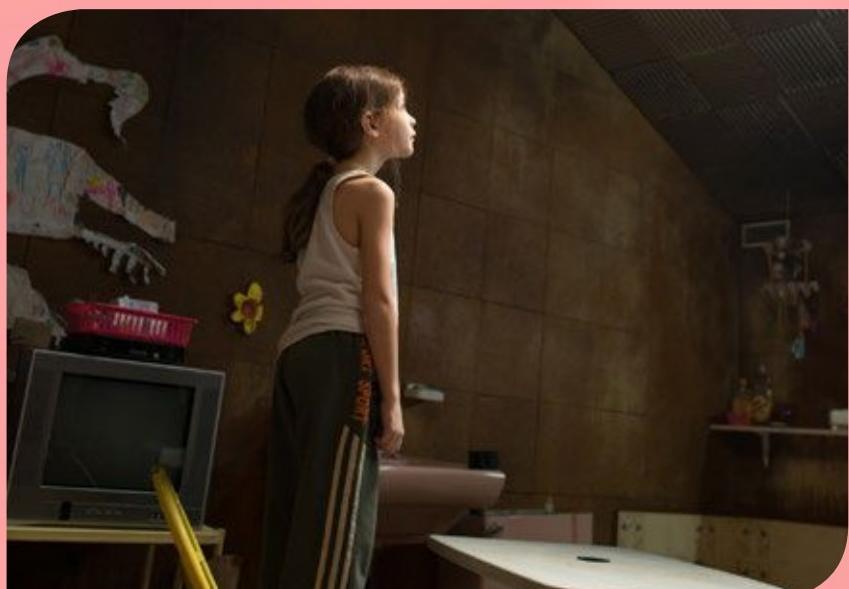
Back out in the real world, and Room establishes its overriding themes of maternalism and the importance of family and relationships, and the need for normality in a world which is far from normal. Nothing is easy for Ma or Jack as Ma is reunited with family who thought they'd lost her forever and who are now faced with forging a relationship with a child they had no idea even existed. Ma becomes overwhelmed by the experience of being free and trying to keep Jack on an even keel as he's introduced to a huge new world of people and places, and Jack himself is at first completely swamped by what awaits him beyond Room, at first terrified and insular but later curious and inquisitive. Brie Larson and, in particular, Jacob Tremblay are just astonishing as Ma and Jack, although we might feel a little exasperated by some of Ma's apparently self-centred actions later in the film.

Room is a magnificent cinematic experience deftly and sympathetically brought to the screen by Abrahamson, who has coaxed stunning performances from his cast and created a haunting, uncomfortable, occasionally voyeuristic movie, which ultimately serves as a life-affirming evocation of the durability and resilience of the human spirit. Brilliant.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED 7

ACTUAL 9





THE GREEN INFERNO

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: ELI ROTH / SCREENPLAY: ELI ROTH, GUILLERMO AMOEDO / STARRING: LORENZA IZZO, ARIEL LEVY, AARON BURNS, DARYL SABARA, KIRBY BLISS BLANTON, MAGDA APANOWICZ, RICHARD BURGI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After six years away from the director's chair (not counting the pilot episode of horror series *Hemlock Grove*), Eli Roth has returned to give us another dose of grisly violence and morbid humour.

A group of student activists travel to the Peruvian Amazon to highlight the ruthless and murderous activities of industrial companies and their armies of mercenaries. However, a plane crash on the way out leaves them stranded in the jungle and held prisoner by the very tribe they came to save. A tribe whose open attitude to roast meat puts all the survivors on the dinner menu.

You have to hand it to Roth, he's found a concept he likes and has stuck with it: hot young things first travelling far outside their comfort zone of urban Americana and then revealed to be woefully unequipped to deal with the horrors that await them. However, instead of necrotisation by a flesh-eating virus or torture by psychotic millionaires, this time the terror comes courtesy of a lost tribe of jungle cannibals daubed in crimson bodypaint that clashes vibrantly with the verdant tropical foliage as they come swarming from the undergrowth like a colony of fire ants. Roth has never been the most subtle of filmmakers, and in the space of twenty minutes, you'll be able to list the order in which the characters will die, and that's not including the half dozen or so redshirts brought along to make up the numbers. To quote the tagline of horror anthology *Cradle of Fear*, it's not if they die, it's how.

Unlike the pointed grotesquery of *Cabin Fever* or the gleeful sadism of *Hostel*, the visceral gore of *The Green Inferno* is all the more gruesome for it being so matter of fact. The tribe aren't

killing, cooking and eating people out of any perverse pleasure or desire to prove themselves, but merely because in the inhospitable terrain of the tropical jungle that's how they survive. More often than not, it's the attitude of villains that breeds your hatred of them rather than their actions, and as the tribe aren't truly villainous in the traditional sense of the word, to give us a figure upon whom to focus our contempt, we instead have one of the activists gradually reveal just how large his ulterior motives are, as well as his sociopathic self-serving attitude. The tribespeople might be hacking people apart to eat, but he's the

one whose protracted and agonising death you'll be clamouring for.

Surprisingly, the film is devoid of misogynistic sexual violence (sadly a consistent rarity in gorefest films), but there is eye-gouging, tongue-ripping, limb-hacking, head-severing, blood-drinking, corpse-roasting and flesh-eating at one point, all within the space of five minutes. Amongst other nasty moments, we also get an obligatory Day of the Dead tribute shot and a particularly unpleasant tribal ritual that heroine Justine is threatened with, which is bluntly signposted earlier in the film but still makes you squirm at the thought of it being carried out.

With events like one survivor attempting to alleviate his stress by masturbating while still in the open and gore-strewn cage, some quite literal toilet humour, and an escape attempt involving stuffing a bag of marijuana down the throat of a deceased and soon to be eaten comrade to get all the natives stoned and harmless, it's clear Roth's time out from behind the camera hasn't dulled his twisted love of dark comedy. He's also ballsy enough about the film's potential success to include a mid-credits sequel hook.

Predictably reminiscent of associated Italian exploitation flicks of the '70s and '80s such as *Cannibal Ferox*, *Natura Contro* (incidentally also known as *The Green Inferno*) and the notorious *Cannibal Holocaust*, *The Green Inferno* is Roth's most technically accomplished film to date. Granted, he doesn't have an especially extensive back catalogue from which you can draw a comparison, but his directorial skills are nevertheless noticeably on the rise. If you can believe it, he's even developed a little restraint. Now hurry up and give us a feature length expansion of that Thanksgiving trailer!

ANDREW MARSHALL

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 8



REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



THE LIBRARIANS - SEASON 1

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTORS: DEAN DEVLIN, MARC ROSKIN, JONATHAN FRAKES, JOHN HARRISON, TAWNIA MCKIERNAN / SCREENPLAY: JOHN RODGERS, JEREMY BERNSTEIN, PAUL GUYOT, GEOFFREY THORNE, KATE RORICK / STARRING: REBECCA ROMIJN, CHRISTIAN KANE, JOHN KIM, LINDY BOOTH, JOHN LARROQUETTE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Taking place after the popular movie trilogy, *The Librarians* is a TV show spin-off which sees previous keeper Flynn Carsen (the film's main protagonist) passing on the mantle to a new group of Librarians, whose jobs are to protect the world from all forms of magical entities that have bled into their reality, including haunted houses, minotaurs, dragons, and their arch-enemy Dulaque. Even if you don't know anything about the movie trilogy, then this series will quickly get you up to speed within the first 15 minutes, and from there on, the show becomes an exciting, albeit insane, fun ride.

Suffice to say that this is much, much lighter fare than your usual fantasy/adventure TV show, and is insanely bonkers and goofy, which won't be for everyone's taste. If you're the kind of person that wants everything to be incredibly dark and serious, then you're better off somewhere else. This is the kind of show that lets you embrace the craziness and just go along for the wild ride, and that proves why there is so much heart and soul to this show. This is a programme that would appeal to all ages, from the colourful sets, playful

music, kitschy props, a light tone and atmosphere to the creative fantasy ideas, and the occasional OTT acting.

The best aspect of the show, though, is the core cast and their interplay. Each one of the Librarians has a distinct and unique voice and personality, which makes it all the more easier to connect with them on their own level. What's also great is that in each episode where there's a different mystery to be solved, each one of them contributes to the cases in their own unique ways: Eve being the leader of the group, Ezekiel pickpocketing and stealing whatever he gets his hands on, Cassie using her memory retrieval skills to calculate and navigate through missions, and Jake being both the brawler and the expert on art, archaeology and myth.

As far as the performances go, it's clear that everyone involved is having a blast. Rebecca Romijn is incredibly solid as Eve, managing to balance both the drama and comedy efficiently well, and both Christian Kane and John Kim give great support to the ragtag team. However, the two standouts of the series were John Larroquette and Lindy Booth, who both steal the entire show.

Larroquette kills it as the Alfred-like Jenkins, perfectly balancing the right mixture of arrogant and pompous with wisdom and understanding, plus he gets a lot of the funniest moments. Lindy is sublime in her role as the vulnerable yet adorable Cassandra; whilst she too gets some of the show's funniest moments ("Okay, new rule. How about we not refer to the tumour that will one day kill me as a brain-grape."), she superbly gives a nuanced performance that is full of innocence, yet equally full of pathos.

Silly and adventurous, *The Librarians* is Indiana Jones meets Doctor Who, being unapologetically zany and unashamed for being so. Even though its light and frothy tone won't be to everyone's tastes and certain episodes do suffer from some minor pacing and writing problems, this is a light-hearted show that has real, genuine heart and soul. Plus, as long as certain audiences leave their cynicism at the door, then this is a show that anyone can enjoy.

RYAN POLLARD





DEEP RED (1975)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DARIO ARGENTO / SCREENPLAY: DARIO ARGENTO, BERNARDINO XAPONI / STARRING: MACHA MERIL, DAVID HEMMINGS, DARIA NICOLODI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Dario Argento made *Deep Red* in 1975, most horror fans got to see an abridged version, exported to the foreign market with hefty cuts to the characterisation. Now, forty years later, the film has been lovingly restored to its full running time of just over two hours, and a brand spanking new Blu-ray release that allows us to look again at what

many consider to be the finest example of the Italian slasher genre known as 'giallo'. So, is this intact version of *Deep Red* the great masterpiece of Italian horror many proclaim it to be?

David Hemmings plays an American living in Rome who witnesses the gruesome murder of his psychic neighbour (yes, she kind of did see it coming) and, convinced that there's a clue

locked away in his memory of the event, sets out to investigate what's going on. Along the way, he has a relationship with a feisty journalist who is also investigating the crime, watches the Italian police force do very little, and manages to be present as other characters meet grizzly ends. By the climax, the wandering plot comes to a conclusion. Of sorts.

Argento's style takes some getting used to. Plot is secondary to technique, visuals and theatricality. Indeed the film astounds with its camera work, its jump cuts, its extreme close ups. Even the opening credits get interrupted for a brief prologue before resuming again, and he uses an almost imperceptible technique, which is very unnerving – the lights on a set going out just before we fade to black. It's an odd touch but a genius one. Hence, some have suggested that Argento is a cinematic poet. But for every Milton there are a thousand crap limericks.

The pace feels uneven and there's little sense of tension or fear. Partly it's because of the bizarre music, much of it by the group Goblin, which comes across like outtakes from the

soundtrack to *The Italian Job*, making a walk down a dark corridor as threatening as an episode of *Loose Women*. The film can be enormously atmospheric – Rome seems to be sparsely populated only by people who stand around like showroom dummies – but it's ruined by scenes of almost farcical comedy and behaviour of huge horror film stupidity. For example, when a woman finds sinister dolls hanging in the room she's just stepped out of, she locks the door and stays inside where the killer clearly must still be rather than running like hell.

Argento's usual themes of gender politics, male emasculation, and female emancipation run throughout, bringing depth to a plot lacking in surprises, and sterling work by Carlo Rambaldi, who just a few years later would bring us *CE3K*'s *Puck* and the *Alien*, makes the not very frequent gore shocking. But *Deep Red* too seldom reaches the poetic heights it aspires to. For that, see Argento's later *Suspiria* and see what a poet really can do.

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★ 7



TRIPPED - SERIES 1

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JAMIE STONE / SCREENPLAY: JAMIE MATHIESON, HARRY & JACK WILLIAMS / STARRING: BLAKE HARRISON, GEORGE WEBSTER, GEORGINA CAMPBELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Name a good, recent sci-fi show on British TV aimed specifically at teens. It's difficult, isn't it? E4's *Tripped* aims to fill that gap in the schedule.

George Webster stars as hapless stoner Milo, while ex-Inbetweener Blake Harrison plays it straight as his more grown-up mate Danny, who much to Milo's annoyance, is

engaged to Georgina Campbell's Kate. And then a strange man with a sword tries to kill Milo, who's rescued by another version of Danny, leaving behind a bracelet that can transport our heroes to parallel universes. Yes, they do get stuck in the wrong world, and yes, they do get into all sorts of japes on their quest to get back.

This Bill and Ted-esque concept comes from a good team – Mathieson (creator and co-writer of episode one) wrote some of the best recent Doctor Who episodes, and the Williams brothers (writers on all four episodes) also have varied comedy and drama credits. The three have a lot of fun with the parallel universe concept, starting small – a world where Milo's dead gran is alive – before upping the stakes more and more, even taking us to a world on the brink of nuclear destruction. Throughout this, the boys are pursued by brutal killers from somewhere in the multiverse, but the plot never gets too complicated, wisely focusing on the characters and the humour.

Despite several very funny moments, however, the comedy doesn't always hit its targets. At times, it's very *Inbetweeners*, with jokes about drugs and various bodily functions, and yet it's so invested in moving the plot along quickly that it doesn't allow the jokes to play out to their full potential, while other gags feel crude for crudeness' sake – a mention that a parallel

version of Danny's dad is dating a Korean rent boy is not a joke in itself, and yet *Tripped* seems to think it is.

The character development, despite Harrison and Webster providing a very watchable double act, is equally hit and miss. Danny's story about having to choose between being friends with Milo and his love for Kate works very well, and is neatly reflected in all the versions of Kate they meet, but Milo's story is on less solid ground. Later in the series, a scene highlights how his adventures have helped him grow up, but the series hasn't done enough to convince us he has.

Nevertheless, the pace of *Tripped* – whole new worlds are explored in each forty minute episode – makes it an enjoyable watch, and with only four of these episodes, it'll only take an evening to get through. It's neither the funniest comedy nor the most exciting sci-fi you'll see this year, but it's a trip you won't regret taking.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★ 7



JEAN-LUC GODARD: THE ESSENTIAL BLU-RAY COLLECTION

BD / DIRECTOR: JEAN-LUC GODARD / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: VARIOUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This five-disc box set features Godard's best early feature films. They are *À Bout De Souffle* (*Breathless*, 1959), *Une Femme est Une Femme* (*A Woman is a Woman*, 1961), *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) and *Alphaville* (1965) along with six hours of extras including trailers, documentaries and interviews with Anna Karina and Fritz Lang, and a booklet with essays about his work is also thrown in for good measure.

Breathless lives up to its title by following the misadventures of small time crook Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who races down the country lanes of France in his stolen US car cursing women drivers. Not surprisingly a police chase ensues with tragic consequences, and he returns to Paris to track down some money he's owed.

Based on a treatment by François Truffaut, using real locations, handheld and tracking camera shots, and edited using jump cuts, it marked the beginning of French New Wave cinema that broke all the rules and themes of prevailing French cinema.

These techniques perfectly blend with the hustle and bustle of the Paris streets and the hectic comings and goings of Michel. Even though he is evading the law, he finds time to pester Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg) who is an on/off girlfriend. His is a world of petty criminality and casual sexual encounters. As in all Godard films, US culture, new

technology, movies, literature, love and their meanings are featured, discussed and questioned.

Paris is the setting again for a love triangle in *A Woman is a Woman*. Angela (Anna Karina) is a stripper who is desperate to have a child, but her husband Emile (Jean-Claude Brialy) isn't keen on the idea. Bookseller Emile would rather go off cycling and is only willing to concede to her needs when she flirts with his best friend Alfred (Jean-Paul Belmondo). Whereas *Breathless* was a black and white tribute to the Poverty Row action and adventure films made by Monogram Pictures, *A Woman is a Woman* tips its hat at US musical comedies and fittingly uses color and Cinemascope.

In *Contempt*, Godard shows his disdain for the many problems and issues involved in the production of a film. Using the story of Paul Javel (Michel Piccoli), a scriptwriter who is married to Camille (Brigitte Bardot), he is taken on by Jeremiah Prokosch (Jack Palance), a flash American producer, to pump some life into his latest film.

Jeremiah is obviously a philistine as he wants to turn Fritz Lang's (starring as himself) thoughtful film about Homer's *The Odyssey* into something with topless mermaids to bring in the punters. Making things even worse, Jeremiah lusts after Camille, so for the sake of money Paul has to prostitute himself artistically, and his wife literally. This mirrors Godard's own

discontent with the filmmaking process in general and the behind-the-scenes battles with his producer Carlo Ponti and the American movie mogul Joseph E. Levine, and problems with his marriage to Anna Karina.

Alphaville takes us into the realms of science fiction, though it is still filmed in Paris rather than using studio set-ups or specially created props. Private eye Lemmy Caution (Eddie Constantine) heads to Alphaville in his Ford Galaxie car. He is a character from the earlier age of naïve, simplistic, B-movie worlds that were inhabited by the likes of Flash Gordon and Dick Tracy. The question is - can they help us now against the might of Von Braun (Howard Vernon), who rules the planet with technology and logic?

To succeed in *Alphaville* you have to be a master of technology. Von Braun tells Lemmy, if he joins his

technological elite he will get "all the money and women you want". Lemmy isn't impressed.

Alphaville shows the war in the future between the cold, rational, controlling force of the Alpha 60 computer that minimises 'the unknowns' and Lemmy who fights it because it would give him "nothing more than a physical and mental existence created and dictated by technology."

Alpha 60 recognises that the unthinking allegiance to science and/or religion by the ordinary person has led inevitably to the conclusion that if they cannot take their destiny into their own hands then they "must be destroyed, which is to say, transformed". Alpha 60 wants to relieve man of the burden of existence, whilst Lemmy wants to embrace poetry, human freedom and expression.

Pierrot Le Fou is a tale of escape and tragedy much like *Breathless*, but this time it is a bourgeois married man, Ferdinand Griffon (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who seeks escape in the French Riviera with his young babysitter Marianne Renoir (Anna Karina). They have a bohemian existence by the sea but Marianne gets bored with Ferdinand's constant reading, writing and philosophy. On returning to Paris, Marianne, much like Patricia at the end of *Breathless*, double-crosses him. The sad clown of a man ends the drama with a tragic series of actions that Alpha 60 would certainly never understand.

These are excellent, engaging, early examples of Godard's adventurous exploration of film, fiction, reality and the nature of being human. FIN

NIGEL WATSON

★★★★★ 9





BATMAN: BAD BLOOD

VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JAY OLIVA / SCREENPLAY: J.M. DEMATTEIS / STARRING: JASON O'MARA, YVONNE STRAHOVSKI, SEAN MAHER, STUART ALLAN, MORENA BACCARIN / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 18TH

Following on from the events of last year's *Batman vs. Robin*, Jay Oliva's *Batman: Bad Blood* is the latest animated outing for the Caped Crusader and his cast of supporting characters. What's interesting here, though, is that the Dark Knight actually plays second fiddle for the most part of the film as the early disappearance of the World's Greatest Detective brings the Bat family together in order to protect Gotham City and to locate the

presumed-dead Batman.

With Dick Grayson stepping into the mantle of the Bat and being joined by Damian Wayne's Robin, there's also the emergence of a new protector of Gotham: the mysterious Batwoman. As the new Batman brings this new heroine into his circle of trust, the three look to solve the puzzle behind Bruce Wayne's whereabouts. In amongst the action, we see appearances by a myriad of familiar villains such as

Mad Hatter, Blockbuster, Tusk, Firefly, Black Mask, and the ominous Heretic. Behind the shadows, though, and the brains behind recent happenings, there's the ever-dangerous figure of Talia al Ghul. Can Gotham cope without the original Caped Crusader, and just what has really happened to Bruce Wayne?

With *Bad Blood*, Jay Oliva has put together a fantastic animated effort. Oliva, who also helmed the breathtaking two-part adaptation of *The Dark Knight Returns* and the equally impressive *Flashpoint Paradox*, not to mention *Justice League: War*, *Assault on Arkham* and *Batman vs. Robin*, has crafted a film full of cinematic flair and brutal, snappy action. This is highlighted no better than during a stunning scene involving Batman and Robin attempting to thwart an attack on Wayne Enterprises by Heretic and his crew, and then there's also a glorious flashback-cum-nightmare to that fateful night in Crime Alley.

A particular highlight here for longtime Bat fans is the dynamic between Dick and Damian, with the back-and-forths between the pair guaranteed to bring a smile to the face of those who loved this

particular Batman and Robin pairing in the comic book world. But it's not just with these two that the entertainment comes, for the film is full of great, snappy dialogue that manages to hit all the right beats.

This latest animated DC effort brings gravitas and jaw-dropping mood-setting moments to what we see play out, whether it's encapsulating the tone that only Gotham City can emanate, or showing the turmoil and troubles that Dick Grayson has had to endure over the years as he struggles with living in the shadow of the Bat. And then there's the brilliant introduction of Batwoman, an instantly likeable character who has her own murky backstory.

To some, the film may suffer because of a lack of the Dark Knight himself, and others may claim that the film becomes too crowded by its conclusion (although the movie's final shot is a great stinger), but *Bad Blood* manages to make you realise why you love Batman and his world so much, without even having to feature the main course himself.

ANDREW POLLARD



THE LAST WITCH HUNTER

BD + DVD / CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: BRECK EISNER / SCREENPLAY: CORY GOODMAN, MATT SAZAMA, BURK SHARPLESS / STARRING: VIN DIESEL, ROSE LESLIE, ELIJAH WOOD, ÓLAFUR DARRI ÓLAFSSON, MICHAEL CAINE / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 7TH

In the Dark Ages, Kaulder (Diesel) hunts down witches with his group of witch hunters. They discover the lair of the Queen Witch and invade it to try and take her out before she unleashes the Black Death upon the world. They seemingly succeed, although Kaulder is cursed with immortality.

Fast forward to present day and Kaulder is now the last of his kind, ably assisted

by a Dolan - a man of the cloth who helps the witch hunters à la Giles in *Buffy*. When his 36th Dolan (Caine) retires and is killed on the same day, he is replaced by the 37th (Wood). Tracking down the killer of the previous Dolan, the pair start piecing things together and realise there is more than meets the eye going on. Kaulder reluctantly receives assistance from a witch, Chloe

(Leslie), in the investigation until it becomes clear that the Queen Witch may not have died after all.

There is so much CGI and unnecessary lens flare on show here, it's as if the filmmakers knew that the thin storyline needed to be covered up by some gaudy effects. This is a prime example of CGI riding roughshod over a film rather than enhancing it. It's flashy but dull. It may have been more interesting to keep the action in the past, even going through history as Kaulder has to move on from each Dolan, as they pass on from their own mortal coil. Instead, by rushing through to the present day, we are presented with a comfortable environment for the main character. Even the introduction of an adversary in the form of Belial (Ólafsson) seems purely to fill screen time until the big reveal is made.

We are provided with a convoluted and confused plotline that appears to be the mixed up love child of a YA fantasy and an action vehicle

devoid of any real action. It tries to make witches ugly and scary again, but fails miserably with its execution, probably due to its devotion to a lower age rating. There are moments that you feel like you are watching a mash-up between *Beautiful Creatures* and *Babylon A.D.*

The plot twists that are used can be seen coming a mile off and, as a result, there is no sense of tension or trepidation. For a fantasy horror, criminally, there are no genuine moments of horror or scares. A major monster that is there to challenge Kaulder is nothing more than a weak CGI creation. What is shocking is the complete waste of talent. Caine and Wood are completely underused in their roles.

A prime example of the studio system not understanding what was required at inception, and hopefully this will be the last we see of this character.

JD GILLAM





COMFORT AND JOY (1984)

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BILL FORSYTH / STARRING: BILL PATERSON, C.P. GROGAN, ELEANOR DAVID / RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 29TH

After the successes of *That Sinking Feeling*, Gregory's *Girl* and *Local Hero*, British filmmaking legend Bill Forsyth does it again with *Comfort and Joy*; which sees Bill Paterson as an isolated loner who has just been abandoned by the love of his life around Christmas time. As he tries to get his life sorted out and continues to thrive as a popular radio jockey, he is continuously led into a very strange battle between warring

ice cream vans over the entire ice cream market of Glasgow.

That premise alone may sound strange, but when you watch the film itself, you realise just what an absolute gem it is and why Bill Forsyth is the legend he is. From the superbly orchestrated opening (very reminiscent of silent comedy) to the heartfelt closing radio soliloquy at the end, this film has what all great dramas have: real human characters, a

grounded yet whimsical tone, comedy that isn't toe curling or over-exaggerated, and most of all, real heart and soul. In its structure and tone, this is a film that's probably completely alien to an audience beyond British demographics, yet at the same time, as with *Local Hero*, Forsyth makes it totally accessible seeing as the characters and situations are absolutely universal all around.

We go on this journey with Bill Paterson's Dickie Bird, and as the film goes on, we understand more and more about him and the emotional plights he's going through. Despite the fact he's a famous radio DJ in his hometown, we understand that deep down, all he wants to do is help people. It's here we understand why he is willing to go to such absurd lengths to find a way of putting an end to the feud between the two battling ice cream proprietors. The outstanding Bill Paterson beautifully conveys all this with enough subtlety and nuance that you do identify with him and care about the trials and tribulations he's put through over the course of the film. And when he inevitably overcomes all odds

by the end, it's a huge punch-in-the-air reaction. Veteran DP Chris Menges perfectly sets the tone of the film with his cinematography, creating an almost melancholic atmosphere, whilst Mark Knopfler's musical score perfectly complements the film's mood.

As well as being a strange movie, *Comfort and Joy* is also a very moving one, boasting terrific performances (particularly by Paterson), and it takes the bittersweet/heartfelt tone that Bill Forsyth is famous for, and does it to absolute perfection. Also, much like *It's a Wonderful Life*, it's one of those movies you can sit and watch with the family at Christmas, and every time you see it, there's something else there that you didn't notice before. It may not have been the massive success that *Local Hero* was, but it is every bit as enjoyable, and it has, at its heart, a really warm affectionate spirit. Much like the 'Frosty Hots' that Bird invents, it's kinda cold and warm at the same time.

RYAN POLLARD



LOST AFTER DARK

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: IAN KESSNER / SCREENPLAY: BO RANSDELL, IAN KESSNER / STARRING: ELISE GATIEN, ROBERT PATRICK, EVE HARLOW, JUSTIN KELLY, MARK WIEBE, JESSE CAMACHO / RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 29TH

Rather than a pastiche of 1980s slasher films, this is a homage to a genre that has never really disappeared. So, but for the odd make-up or clothing decision, there is little to distinguish between *Lost After Dark* and any other teens-in-peril flick of recent years. And while there is plenty to enjoy among the performances, the plot seems

determined to undermine everything the cast achieve.

Adrienne (Kendra Leigh Timmins) and seven friends misappropriate a school bus and head off for her father's empty holiday cabin, but before they arrive the bus runs out of gas and the kids find themselves stranded in the forest. Before long,

they discover an apparently abandoned house and decide to settle in for the night, but as is the way in these stories, it is actually the home of the infamous Joad family, and junior isn't as deceased as the authorities assumed...

The cast attack the material with commendable gusto, and while the roles they're playing are entirely the archetypes you'd expect, the actors at least imbue each of the characters with enough personality that you care in which order they are going to die. It is to the film's credit that the order isn't entirely predictable, although there is a moment that completely spoils the surprise over which one will ultimately survive. Conversely, the script gives them very little beyond the minimum you'd expect, and while the whole thing is played with good humour, it is also presented without enough actual humour to make the endeavour seem worthwhile.

There is a "girls practising kissing" scene straight out of 1999's *Cruel Intentions*, and a "technical glitch" we've seen before in 1990's *Gremlins 2*, which is barely signalled beforehand and in the absence of any other postmodernism,

takes you right out of the fiction. The overwhelming impression, particularly given the lack of any classic 1980s hits on the soundtrack and the very subdued approach towards kitting out the cast in overtly 1980s fashion, is of a production that lacks the courage of its convictions. Such that the idea of doing a 1980s slasher flick became less attractive once the cast and crew had assembled to make it, perhaps.

The last twenty minutes includes a number of retro touches, such as the arrival and subsequent fate of Robert Patrick and the expository cameo from Rick Rosenthal as the Sheriff, but by this stage, it's hard to really care beyond the simple pleasure of watching a cheap but competent shocker. Even the murders are crafted with considerably less invention than you might expect, and the chances are that as much as you might enjoy *Lost After Dark*, you'll probably forget the entire thing the minute it's finished.

J.R. SOUTHALL





FRANKENSTEIN

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BERNARD ROSE / STARRING: XAVIER SAMUEL, DANNY HUSTON, CARRIE-ANN MOSS, TONY TODD / RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 22ND

His moniker may be in the title, but Viktor Frankenstein barely figures in this modern take on the classic tale, helmed by Candyman director Bernard Rose. His monster takes top billing, more concerned with his rejection by his mother, Viktor's wife – a neat twist on the mommy issues found in Shelley's original novel.

Modernity gets you a monster grown in Viktor's lab, mobile phones, police

brutality and hookers, but the story's heart and soul remains essentially faithful to the source material. It cherry picks elements from the book and subsequent adaptations, repurposing them for our times. "It's alive!" Viktor Frankenstein (Danny Huston) cheers in the film's opening moments. From there, it's not long before the experiment falls apart and Viktor attempts to dispose of his creation like yesterday's

rubbish, strangling the poor kid (Xavier Samuel) out on a gurney while de facto mother Marie (Carrie-Anne Moss) watches reluctantly. But like a more depressed, thankfully silent Deadpool (give or take an engagingly loquacious narration), this monster possesses a mean healing factor, leaving him a very difficult man to kill.

The Monster's befriending of a friendly stray dog is a portent for terrible things to come; Frankenstein is one of the most upsetting horror films ever made, sending poor Monster lurching from one awful tragedy to the next. Leave it to Bernard Rose to make the iconic little girl by the lake sequence even more traumatic than it already inherently is. Next up on the Frankenstein's Monster checklist is the blind old man, beautifully played by genre legend Tony Todd. It's the erstwhile Candyman who takes Monster under his wing, teaching him how to speak and not to eat rats from the dumpster. He provides a little much-needed levity too, although one does spend the whole time waiting for the

other boot to drop and for Monster to be hit with his next dose of inevitable heartbreak.

And heartbreak there is in spades. Frankenstein is an intensely violent and gory film, but it's the emotion that'll stick with you, thanks to a perfectly judged performance from Samuel. Moss and Huston do a lot with little screen time, hitting just the right notes of sympathetic and awful before it's time for Monster's escape. If it weren't for Todd, Moss would steal the show – but he is indeed in it, and it's his best role and performance since he first wore the hook and the bees all those years ago. It peters out somewhat by the end – where the relative fidelity to its source material finally starts to weigh the story down – but one can only be so angry and tortured for so long.

Frankenstein is a triumph – one of the best adaptations of the story ever made, one of the best Tony Todd performances ever seen, and a film as devastating as it is beautiful. And it is plenty beautiful.

JOEL HARLEY



SWORD OF THE ASSASSIN

VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VICTOR VU / STARRING: HUYNH DONG, MIDU, VAN TRANG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

On paper, Victor Vu's *Sword of the Assassin* is a fusion of styles that shouldn't work – a gorgeously shot, graceful, historical action drama combined with all the execution of a bog standard B-movie. On viewing the film however, *Sword of the Assassin* takes tired characters and clichéd plots and manages to scrape together a perfectly pleasant affair that's happy in its own limitations.

The film has an extremely run

of the mill young-inexperienced-warrior-must-harness-abilities-if-he's-to-honour-family-name-by-defeating-corrupt-higher-powers plot, but it doesn't get any of that wrong, per-se. As mentioned, it carries its overused story well enough with just enough charisma to make the whole affair watchable until the end. But if anything, *Sword of the Assassin* won't be remembered for its lack of a fresh spin on character and plot.

Rather, this film is Vietnam's first attempt at crafting its very own martial arts epic, and if one can take anything away from this film, it's the stunning Vietnamese scenery.

Vu does more than a fine job of capturing the breathtaking backdrop of *Sword of the Assassin* to full effect, with the film's not-so-ambitious take on character and plot serving almost as a platform to show off the film's spellbinding appearance. Vu also seems well aware of the scenery he's surrounded by, and knows it's his greatest tool in crafting this film, and so he stuffs as much of the eye-popping landscapes as possible into the film's plot. We see our heroes traverse through engulfing rivers, soaring mountains, and dense forests that put any CGI-produced setting to shame, whilst several villages, temples and other rustic locations have a warm welcome of authenticity.

But aside from the visuals, *Sword of the Assassin*'s otherwise mundane content isn't taking the film to the Oscars anytime soon. What begins as an earnest enough tale of redemption crumbles

into muddled conspiracy drama towards the end, with twists and turns that fail to have the desired shock impact. Leading man Huynh Dong and heroine Midu give solid, enjoyable performances, even if one can spot their inevitable romance beginning to blossom before the script can.

Sword of the Assassin is an odd mixture of spellbinding cinematography that belittles its B-movie schlock. It may be clunky in its execution, but it has a puppy-like enthusiasm in getting the job done. Perhaps the real joy here is seeing this weary tale given fresh life thanks to its settings, and with such a basic enough film under Vu's belt, *Sword of the Assassin* may open the door to an armada of new films keen to set up shop in Vietnam's stunning natural wonders. For now however, *Sword of the Assassin* is an enjoyable B-movie romp with visuals that set it far apart from others and rewards extended viewing.

FRED McNAMARA





AIR

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: CHRISTIAN CANTAMESSA / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTIAN CANTAMESSA, CHRIS PASETTO / STARRING: DJIMON HOUNSOU, NORMAN REEDUS, SANDRINE HOLT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Poor Norman Reedus can't seem to catch a break. Fresh from fighting The Walking Dead in one post-apocalyptic wasteland, he's stuck with the task of keeping humanity alive in another. In Air, the debut feature from video game writer Christian Cantamessa, the Earth has been all but destroyed by chemical weapons; Reedus' Bauer and Djimon Hounsou's Cartwright are the maintenance workers

who wake up every six months to perform checks on the underground bunker they, and hundreds of other cryogenically frozen survivors, live in.

And then one day, for some reason or other, Cartwright's bed sets on fire. Bugger. Unless they find him a new one, he won't be able to go back into stasis – and there isn't an Ikea in sight. This quest leads to tensions rising between the two workers and

dark secrets about humanity being uncovered.

It's a good concept for a low-budget character-based sci-fi drama, but the way the story plays out is, frankly, frustrating. The characters and world are set up nicely – Bauer's the untidy one who won't stop singing The Clash, Cartwright just wants to get his job done but is hiding the fact he's having visions of his lost love. There's clear tension here, and Reedus and Hounsou convey this unstable friendship nicely. And then they spend half the film looking on some shelves for a bed.

When events do ramp up, there are some well played moments of conflict, with one scene in particular, in which Bauer finds himself in mortal danger and it's unclear where Cartwright is, planting a lot of intriguing questions in the mind. However, the ending again feels weak, as a major twist is forgotten about and a final showdown limps along unthrillingly; Cartwright supposedly going mad is repeatedly mentioned, but the film doesn't have the guts to fully pursue this, and the visions of

his lover (Holt) end up feeling too much of an awkward cliché.

Nevertheless, Cantamessa and production designer Brian Kane have done a good job of making the bunker into an effectively claustrophobic setting, with the technology being a great cross between futuristic and falling apart, in the same way that made iconic sets such as the Nostromo and the Millennium Falcon so believable. The pair's rooms are decorated with great little character-adding details – a poster of a cat keeps them motivated. The sequence where Cartwright ventures out of the bunker lets the visuals down, though – the darkness and tight angles with which it's shot give away the low budget.

So there's a lot to like here, especially for a director's debut film; the intriguing concept, strong performances and impressive visuals almost make up for the fact that a lot of it is about fixing a bed.

Extras: Featurettes

KIERON MOORE



THE SCOPIA EFFECT

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER BUTLER / STARRING: JOANNA IGNACZEWSKA, AKIRA KOIEYAMA, LOUIS LABOVITCH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hypnotic regression goes a bit far when, hoping to cure her bout of depression, Basia's psychiatrist accidentally sends her back a bit too far, unlocking memories from reincarnations past, in locales as diverse as Olde England, India and Japan in 1824 A.D. Oops.

As past lives begin to merge with the present, Basia is sent spiralling into a fevered living nightmare from which she cannot wake, experiencing horrific visions, dirty strangers from the past appearing in her living room,

and waking up with her head and arm stuck in the wall. What's a 'Scopia Effect'? A phenomenon that cannot be explained by science, the film helpfully tells us. Yeah, that sums up The Scopia Effect pretty well.

A dreamlike, tricksy, supernatural thriller featuring fully realised digressions into the (long) past (oh hi, 18th century France), The Scopia Effect is one of the most ambitious low-budget indies you'll ever find. That's an even more impressive

statement when one realises that it's only writer/director Christopher Butler's first film. There's a level of ambition, intelligence and sheer technical competence at play here that some budget horror directors never achieve during their whole career. Butler's background in advertising surely helps, a strong eye for imagery and storytelling that sits at ease with his short cuts and the movie's own scattershot style.

The whole thing lives or dies on its Basia, and, thankfully, Joanna Ignaczewska is more than up to the part, anchoring the film with her heartbreakingly powerful portrayal of the terrified, confused young woman under attack from time itself –

contending not only with the demons from her own past, but those of lives lived millennia ago. She is slightly annoying when she cries, but we'll let her off, given the horrors experienced here. And there we were thinking that acting like a chicken for a few days, or the plot of CBB's Big Kids, was the worst possible outcome of hypnosis.

Put down the phone and pay attention: The Scopia Effect is a smart, unpredictable and original little thriller. It'll have you on the edge of your seat, literally wondering where it is headed. Africa of 1954, you say?

JOEL HARLEY





BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS + THE SEVEN MINUTES (1970)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: RUSS MEYER / SCREENPLAY: ROGER EBERT / STARRING: DOLLY READ, CYNTHIA MYERS, JOHN LAZAR, DAVID GURIAN, MARCIA MCBROOM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Russ Meyer's Beyond the Valley of the Dolls is the stuff of legend. The flamboyant, over-the-top director finally helmed a Hollywood studio effort with this 1970 release, and the result was something that is often claimed by many to be one of the greatest cult movies of all time. With this new release, Arrow Video has also included Meyer's only other Hollywood effort, The Seven Minutes, as part of an overall package that's more crammed than the brassieres of the

busty beauties that the director was famed for spotlighting throughout his iconic career.

In its simplest form, Beyond the Valley of the Dolls, co-written by legendary film critic Roger Ebert, is a film focused on an all-girl rock 'n' roll band dreaming of becoming superstars. That's the simple description, but there's a whole lot more going on in this glorious mish-mash of a movie. Like an erratic jigsaw puzzle, the film transcends genres and really, really

shouldn't work, yet it does. And wonderfully so. Combining elements of a musical, of a tense drama, of a humourous, snappy dialogue-driven effort, and dotted throughout with lashings of truly dark moments, Russ Meyer's Hollywood debut is a glorious rollercoaster of a ride to embark on; as we find ourselves attached to The Kelly Affair on the drug-riddled, sex-plagued excesses that come hand-in-hand with trying to make it in the big time. Though the initially wholesome simple girls lose their inhibitions as they get rebranded as The Carrie Nations, their journey makes for an enthralling viewing experience as we watch events take a hectic and whirlwind turn for the dramatic.

As a film, Beyond the Valley of the Dolls works just as well as it ever has. Sure, if you thought it was a ludicrous act of overindulgence from Meyer the first time out, chances are your opinion won't have changed upon a repeat viewing. If you loved the wonderfully crazed world that Meyer crafted here, though, then you'll adore the film even more in this crisp, high definition restoration of an all-time classic. Never has camp and crazy looked as good!

Whilst there's a whole host of brilliant extras included in this re-release, it's also great to see Meyer's other Hollywood feature, The Seven Minutes, included as an accompanying piece. Not as well-revered as Beyond the Valley of the Dolls, The Seven Minutes and its tale of pornography vs. supposed decency is still an enjoyable viewing experience that is very much a typical Russ Meyer movie as anything in the director's back catalogue.

To long-standing Meyer fans, this is a re-release firmly worth an investment. For those curious about a director heralded by many yet ridiculed by others, this stunning release is the perfect chance to see what all the fuss is about and to make your own mind up when it comes to 'The King of the Nudies'.

Extras: Two commentaries / Introduction to Beyond the Valley of the Dolls by John Lazar / Five featurettes / Interviews / Screen tests / Photo galleries / Trailers / Collectors' booklet

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 9



HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2

BD + DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: GENNDY TARTAKOVSKY / SCREENPLAY: ROBERT SMIGEL, ADAM SANDLER / STARRING: ADAM SANDLER, ANDY SAMBERG, KEVIN JAMES, SELENA GOMEZ, DAVID SPADE, STEVE BUSCEMI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hotel Transylvania 2 is a wacky animated adventure firmly aimed at the family market. The first movie took modern family and parenting ideas and laughed at them in a warm and friendly way, all the while spicing it up with slapstick humour and monster themed gags. The sequel is more of the same.

The premise of the Hotel Transylvania world is simple; monsters are real and they've gone commercial. Drac the vampire runs a hotel and he's assisted by the usual pantheon of monsters: The Invisible Man, The Mummy, a werewolf and, of course, Frankenstein (short for Frankenstein's Monster or just

Frank if you know him well). In the previous movie, one of the human guests fell in love with Drac's daughter Mavis, and in this one they get married and have a child. The rest of the plot is Drac trying to raise a small child, whilst his parents try and come to terms with being parents. Really, the movie is simply a collection of gags they left out of the first feature with the sentiment layered on thick so you care about the characters.

The movie has a rather strong cast and crew, but despite this, it all feels rather generic. Take director Genndy Tartakovsky for example. He has created some truly remarkable pieces of animation in the past. He has under his belt the likes of Star Wars: Clone Wars and Samurai Jack. This means that Hotel Transylvania 2's action sequences are clever and amusing, with the monster's special powers appearing simple and fun, but it lacks his trademark spark. Adam Sandler practically phones it in, despite being

the main actor, and is only really saved by a strong performance from Selena Gomez as Mavis. Mel Brooks also puts in a star turn as a grumpy old vampire.

Despite its plastic Halloween decoration-style storyline and characters, Hotel Transylvania 2 is an enjoyable piece of family fare, and perfect for getting little ones into the less scary side of all things spooky.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES



David Bowie

In the big Venn diagram of the creative arts there is an intersection between popular music and science fiction. With David Bowie's recent death, both worlds are diminished and his absence will be felt for years to come. With such works as **The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars**, we have the story of an alien visitor to Earth spreading a message of love (and later inspiring the Paul Magrs character Vince Cosmos). This is the most obvious of the many examples of the use of science fiction themes in David Bowie's work. Let's also remember his other, many contributions to genre, on album, and indeed in film (**The Man Who Fell to Earth** and **The Hunger** spring to mind). He will be missed.

Hawkwind

Staying with popular music, the mighty Hawkwind, the legendary space rockers, are releasing their thirtieth album **The Machine Stops**. This is a concept album of the E. M. Forster short story of the same name originally published in the **Oxford and Cambridge Review** of 1909. Forster is more normally associated with works such as **A Passage to India**, **Where Angels Fear to Tread**, and **A Room with a View**. **The Machine Stops** is a post-apocalyptic tale seen by some as foretelling instant messaging and the Internet. The Hawkwind album should be released in time for a short UK tour this April.

Lethbridge Stewart Audios

Fantom Films will be releasing audios of the Lethbridge-Stewart books from Candy Jar Books. These will be read by Terry Molloy and the first of these, **The Forgotten Son** by Andy Frankham-Allen, will be available in February. More details on the Fantom Films website.

BBC Audio Drama Award Winners

After months of anticipation, the winners of the BBC Audio Drama Awards were announced in London. While none of the genre titles were victorious, several winners were in our sandbox. Alfred Molina (**Spider-Man 2**) walked away with Best Actor for **A View from the Bridge**, and the legendary John Hurt was awarded the Outstanding Contribution. Best Use of Sound went to David Thomas and Julian Simpson (dir. **Doctor Who - The Rebel Flesh/The Almost People**) for **Fugue State**, with Simpson also taking the Tinniswood Award for Best Radio Drama Script. The Best Online Only Audio Drama went to **The Kindness of Time**, written by Deirdre Burton and Tom Davis.

STARBURST congratulates the winners, but also celebrates all those nominated and shortlisted.

Big Finish Day 8

Fans of Big Finish gathered in Slough earlier in January to hear about Louise Jameson's Leela meeting John Hurt's War Doctor in

a future release, a second series of **The Prisoner** and the return of Naoko Mori as Toshiko Sato in the second series of **Torchwood** audios. The most important news of the day was Paul Darrow being back in studio and attending the event following the major surgery he survived last year. He received several well-deserved rounds of applause and seemed in great spirits.

STAR TREK EXCELSIOR Kickstarter

If you're a fan of **Star Trek**, you'll want to add **Star Trek Excelsior** to your listening list. These fan audios are available on starshipexcelsior.com, and this year have launched a Kickstarter to get Nichelle Nichols and Walter Koenig to join the crew. The funding reached \$16,011, so we will have the pleasure of hearing Uhura and Chekov from September 8th in time for the fiftieth anniversary of **Star Trek**.

THE COMING OF THE MARTIANS

EverybodyElse productions has started a new website thecomingofthemartians.com to support their 2017 release of a faithful audio dramatisation of the original H. G. Wells novel. This is worth visiting just for the superb soundtrack.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

THE WAR DOCTOR 02: INFERNAL DEVICES

Three more stories starring John Hurt as the War Doctor. His battles with the Daleks get even more intense, and there are more shocks in store for the Time Lord. Hurt is joined by a cast of well-known voices including Jacqueline Pearce, David Warner, and Jaye Griffiths.

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 29th

+++

TORCHWOOD 1.6 MORE THAN THIS

Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles) faces off against one of her biggest adversaries: a Cardiff City Council Planning Officer. He wants to do away with Torchwood, but Gwen proves that the organisation is very much needed.

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 29th

+++

VIENNA SERIES 3

Chase Masterson returns as the stunning bounty hunter Vienna Salvatori in three new adventures that will test her limits. Samantha Béart, Terry Malloy, and Sophie Aldred also lend their talents to this fabulous, action-packed series.

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 29th

+++

DOCTOR WHO: FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES 5.02

THE LABYRINTH OF BUDA CASTLE

Tom Baker and Lalla Ward return in an adventure set in Budapest, where plans for a relaxing break are foiled when an apparent vampire attack is discovered. Cue a struggle in claustrophobic tunnels, a Dracula hunt and a maniac with plans of his own.

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 29th

To order, or for more information, head over to bigfinish.com

BRAND NEW AUDIO ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE



BBC

DOCTOR WHO

PAUL MCGANN • ALEX KINGSTON • NICOLA WALKER • HATTIE MORAHAN

DOOM COALITION 2

FIVE-DISC BOX SET AVAILABLE ON CD OR DOWNLOAD!
AVAILABLE MARCH 2016

BIG
FINISH WE LOVE
STORIES

WWW.BIGFINISH.COM

@BIGFINISH

THEBIGFINISH



BBC, DOCTOR WHO (word marks, logos and devices), TARDIS (word marks and devices) are trade marks of the British Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence.
BBC logo © BBC 1996. Doctor Who logo © BBC 2009. River Song created by Steven Moffatt and used under licence.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



NO POINT TALKING

PRODUCER: NICOLA SWORDS / AUTHOR &
NARRATOR: GEOFF RYMAN / MUSIC: SCANNER
(R.RIMBAUD) / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (IPLAYER)

Like its ill-tempered sibling 'dystopia', the idea of 'utopia' continues to provide a fertile source of inspiration for contemporary science fiction writers. New one-off BBC Radio 4 Extra drama No Point Talking imagines a future California separated into two parts: one a socialist, feminist enclave, run on open co-operative principles; the other a conservative free-market citadel, protected by closed borders and a popular militia. Both societies consider themselves as alternate

models of a modern utopia.

Written by award-winning novelist Geoff Ryman, No Point Talking is a companion piece to a wider research project exploring the role of gender in science fiction (a theme he expands on in new radio documentary Herland). Voiced as a first-person narrative by the author, the story begins with the arrival of a staunch conservative wind-turbine technician and his family in the egalitarian hub of 'West Cal' in the search of a new life and a new job.

While he finds the principles of this new society (such as equal pay, communal living and multiculturalism) alien and uncomfortable, his wife Candy finds new purpose and a sense of freedom in the collapse of the traditional gender roles of their old life in Texas. The strains in their relationship reach breaking point when he insists on leaving for a new job in the capitalist sanctuary of 'East Cal' and the newly-independent Candy refuses to leave, staying behind with the children. Confused and embittered, the engineer takes the new job (one without the protection of a minimum wage or health insurance) and makes plans to join the local state militia – which Ryman hints might yet turn its guns on the hated free cities beyond its walls.

The author's empathy with the norm-breaking dissidents of 'West Cal' is

evident throughout the tale, as are his dislike for his hero's 'reactionary' ideas. Yet unlike many realisations of fictional utopias, this is a very pragmatic, real-world rendering of the 'perfect' society. 'West Cal' is not a place of contentment, fulfilment and recreation, but a hard-working community held together by collective effort, graft, welfare and even charity. It is not a place that has abolished money; rather it is a society that upholds the principles of fair pay for all.

Ryman's premise – that of two neighbouring, rival communities with different ideas of what 'utopia' looks like – is an interesting one. Although there are too many themes battling for attention in so short a drama to really do justice to any of them, Ryman does tease out some insightful contrasts between the two societies, and the bewilderment of the main protagonist (in a world he is completely bemused by) is convincingly realised. Ryman's delivery is well judged and the soundscape by Robin Rimbaud is suitably otherworldly without being intrusive. However, the provocative setting and the intriguing conflicts introduced here deserve far more air time than the paltry fifteen minutes of this solitary instalment.

RICH CROSS

★★★★★ ★★★★★ 7

is so astonishingly upbeat; any extra stimulation will absolutely level you. Think back to your time as a kid, lying on the floor in front of the television, playing video games. Yes, usually there was a massive thing of sugary, caffeinated fizzy water that you'd pour down your gullet, and that was okay then, because you were playing video games and you were a child and you could handle it. Now, as an adult: forget about it.

The music from Mega Man brings back memories of frantically pushing buttons, moving the controller around, lifting it up to try and get a little height on that jump to the next platform. It's a nostalgic trip, yes, but the way these tracks will easily weasel themselves back into your subconscious will make it feel like you last played these games yesterday.

Unsurprisingly, a full third of the music comes from the first two Mega Man games. Given the fact that the music for the second instalment is so highly regarded, one can be surprised that Spacelab9 didn't just release the music from that game as a stand-alone.

It would've sold like hotcakes. If nothing else, hearing the evolution of the franchise's music as it moved across platforms is kind of a cool deal, and really makes this more than glorying in things one did as a youngster. This is a legitimate historical chronicle, and that makes The Best Mega Man of 1-10 really worth your time.

If nothing else, the packaging on this LP makes it worth grabbing alone. The Mega Pack edition comes in a slipcase designed to look like the old Nintendo cartridge slipcases. The jacket looks like a Japanese throwback, featuring a gigantic image of Mega Man himself on the cover, and the inner sleeve features full artwork of every boss character. The vinyl itself comes in a variety of colors. Our copy is on Mega Man colored vinyl, which is clear with white and blue splatter. It's gorgeous. Just looking at this will make chiptunes bleep through your brain, and once you put it on, your thumbs will immediately start to twitch.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★ ★★★★★ 9



THE BEST OF MEGA MAN 1-10

COMPOSER: VARIOUS ARTISTS / LABEL:
SPACELAB9 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Do not, under any circumstances, consume caffeinated beverages while listening to this compilation from Spacelab9. The Best of Mega Man 1-10



THE SECRET OF SPRINGHEEL'D JACK S3 EPISODE TWO: THE TUNNELS OF DEATH

DIRECTOR: ROBERT VALENTINE / **WRITTEN BY:** GARETH PARKER & ROBERT VALENTINE / **STARRING:** CHRISTOPHER FINNEY, ANDREW SHEPHERD, JENNY RUNACRE, DAVID BENSON, MATTHEW KELLY / **PUBLISHER:** THE WIRELESS THEATRE COMPANY / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

It has taken something like five years for The Wireless Theatre Company to tell their version of the story of Spring-heeled Jack, the diabolical superhuman of Victorian folklore. Tying real-life events into an otherwise fictionalised plot, Robert Valentine and Gareth Parker's story reaches its penultimate instalment with this, the middle episode of the third Springheel'd Jack trilogy. With one eye on the resolution – like many modern variations on factually based Victorian

era characters – Valentine and Parker are promising a 'reveal' in the final episode, albeit one that has more in common with Child of the Vodyanoi than it does The Real Mary Kelly – and the other on tying up the lead character's narrative arc – The Tunnels of Death might have felt like a placeholder episode, treading water before the big finale. In fact, in many ways it's the best and most entertaining instalment of the series so far.

Christopher Finney is an older Josiah Smith here, a disaffected echo of the young officer whose life became inextricably linked with the legend of Jack back in the first series. In The Secret of Springheel'd Jack, his disinterest in the politics through which his life will ultimately end up elapsing back to the way it began is born out of the imminence of that departure, but here in episode two it is his reacquaintance with Andrew Shepherd's Hopcraft – a character whose origins reflect Smith's own in opposing and conflicting ways – that reignites Josiah's fascination with the demon that orphaned them both. After a hair-raising escape from the climax of the previous instalment, there's an amusing if insubstantial stopover at a German submarine, before Smith out-espionages the spies and leads Hopcraft back to the very beginning, Scratch Row and the subterranean lair of the creature, ready for a final reunion in the concluding episode.

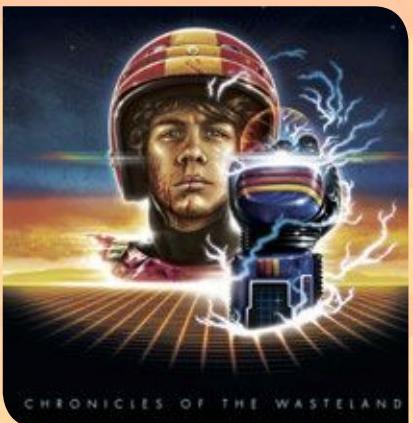
The Springheel'd Jack saga has been four hours of good old-fashioned Victorian melodrama, but in this eighth of the nine episodes, the humour is brought to the forefront, thanks to the

conflicting characters of the two leads. But more than that, by having Hopcraft and Smith paired up for the entire duration, Valentine and Parker finally tease out the forces that drive the pair in opposite directions. Hopcraft's response to a line of conversation dealing with the pair's mothers says everything you need to know about both him and Smith, and the promises they both make with regards to the events still to come leave us tantalised as to how all this will end. Suddenly, the reveal of Springheel'd Jack's provenance takes on far less importance than the question of Josiah Smith's destination.

The Secret of Springheel'd Jack uses the rise of the German war machine as an interesting backdrop to a story that begins in Aldershot Barracks (a real event that has been absorbed into the fiction), but the politicking of Disraeli and others is little more than texture in a story that has been far more about Smith than it really has Jack or anything else.

The acting, as you would expect from The Wireless Theatre Company, is – but for some rather fishy German accents (one of which deliberately so) – uniformly excellent, and if you're minded to enjoy Victoriana, audio drama and the supernatural, it is well worth seeking out the Wireless website to partake of the story so far ahead of its final instalment, due on a pair of headphones near you later this year.

J.R. SOUTHALL



TURBO KID: CHRONICLES OF THE WASTELAND

COMPOSER: LE MATOS / **LABEL:** DEATH WALTZ RECORDING CO. / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Our first viewing of the post-apocalyptic adventure retro action flick Turbo Kid left us exhilarated and excited, like we'd just seen the coolest thing ever. Repeated viewings have, sadly, not proved as passionately thrilled, with a diminishing level of return every time it gets put on.

Le Matos' score for the film, however, is the exact opposite. Since the abridged

vinyl version of the score – entitled *Chronicles of the Wasteland* – arrived in the mail last week, we've been spinning both LPs back-to-back at least twice a day. While the film's retro aesthetic doesn't hold up to scrutiny, revealing far too many seams, Le Matos' vintage take on synthesizer score might be the best thing we've heard since the golden age of Tangerine Dream.

It's a warm and inviting score, which – while still evoking the wasteland of the film – brings a smile as one listens to it. The more the volume creeps up, the better it gets as well. While the majority of the album is of a rather sedate, mood-setting nature, when one cranks the likes of "Highway 64" or "Playtime Is Over", there's a distinct chance of dance parties breaking out in the living room. These tracks are fully revved up and ready to go, really capturing the exhilaration one feels upon watching Turbo Kid for the first time.

Usually, the film scores we review have a song or two with vocals, and they're usually the low point of any given album. Such is not the case for Le Matos' collaboration with "No Tomorrow", featuring female singer Pawws. It's absolutely gorgeous, and if you enjoyed "A Real Hero", the College song with Electric Youth from the Drive soundtrack,

you'll absolutely adore this song.

Part of what really makes all of this work is that the *Chronicles of the Wasteland* album is essentially a reworked version of the Turbo Kid film score, consolidated into a proper album, rather than just a collection of music from the movie. It really flows, and works equally well as a Saturday night or Sunday morning record, thanks to the powerful synths used so masterfully.

Be it the anthemic "The Kid" or the brightly laconic "Like Faith or Some Shit", Le Matos create music that makes us want to live in a vividly neon world where an android can defeat warriors with a gnome stick, and we ride off into a tequila sunset. We just wish everything had that cool-as-hell voiceover from the introduction.

While the liner notes consist mainly of credits and the lyrics to "No Tomorrow," it's nice that there's an insert at all. The gatefold sleeve features both amazing original art and a display of the film's logo as the interior. The tri-color striped vinyl sounds fantastic, especially for the multiple colors, and it looks pretty damn amazing as well.

NICK SPACEK





THE PRISONER: VOLUME 1

DIRECTOR & AUTHOR: NICK BRIGGS / **STARRING:** MARK ELSTOB, JOHN STANDING, CELIE IMRIE, RAMON TIKARAM, MICHAEL COCHRANE, SARA POWELL, KRISTINA BUKIAITE / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Recreating a well-defined classic cult show such as *The Prisoner* is an invidious task; stay too close to the original and you get accused of adding nothing, drift too far and you get accused of losing something essential. With *The Prisoner: Volume 1*, writer and director Nick Briggs has the unenviable task of keeping true to the original (unlike the 2009 remake), making something relevant to a new audience and allowing room for new ideas to flourish. We're pleased to say this has largely been achieved.

True to the TV series, the boxset

starts with Departure and Arrival (the TV series started with Arrival) and brings us Mark Elstob's take on the classic Patrick McGoohan character of Number 6. It also paints an audio picture of The Village and starts to introduce the many and varied staples of the show's DNA. The plot is mostly that of the original with some embellishments, including Nick Briggs' focus on the advanced technology being used to control the lives of those exiled to The Village. Mark Elstob convinces from the first line, and the role of Number 9 blossoms with the performance of Sara Powell. The episode has a lot to do and manages it all. We even get to meet Rover, the seemingly intelligent white ball security guard.

Next up is a reimagining of the episode The Schizoid Man (it was the fifth episode of the TV run) and The Village feels well established, which is just as well given this is about doppelgängers and misdirection. Mark Elstob plays Number 6 and a look-alike (Number 12), but there is twist layered on twist. Nick Briggs has cleverly replaced the Number 24 of the original with a return for Sara Powell's Number 9. In a single stroke this gives the listener a firm anchor as they attempt to navigate a complex story.

Third is Nick's entirely original Welcome to Your Beautiful Village. This is a surreal three-hander concerning what happens when Number 6 experiences almost total sensory deprivation and has only a call in the dark from Number 9 to help guide him. Meanwhile, what is Number 2 up to, and could it be he needs Number 6's help? This is a superb piece of writing, well performed and seems to go to the heart of some of Nick Briggs' ideas of the essence of The

Prisoner without making any definitive statements on what is precisely going on. It is a story designed for audio and a great addition to the canon.

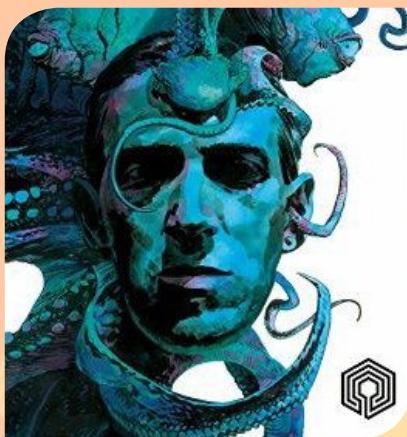
The set ends with a version of Chimes of Big Ben in which Number 6 appears to escape The Village in the company of beautiful Lithuanian Number 8 (Kristina Buikaite). This was originally the second TV story but works well as the final instalment of this first boxset. Even knowing the original this is a hugely enjoyable tale.

Two other aspects need mentioning: first, the various actors playing Number 2; secondly the soundscape.

The part of Number 2 is pivotal to The Village and Big Finish has cast a great set of actors in this role (which changes every story). Between them, John Standing, Celia Imrie, Ramon Tikaram and Michael Cochrane each bring something special to the part and set a high bar for future casting. The sound captures many of the tonal elements of The Village from the 1960s, the music is as it should be. One complaint though – the TV show had a classic beginning with snips of dialogue over the theme tune; although the theme tune is there, the voice-over isn't. Maybe that would take re-imaging too close to imitation, but it is missed!

While it will never be possible to please every fan of the original in every detail, this is a rich retelling replete with potential and on the strength of this boxset, there is plenty more to look forward to, and this should include more wholly original material.

TONY JONES



TALES OF H. P. LOVECRAFT

COMPOSER: THE DUKE ST. WORKSHOP WITH LAURENCE R. HARVEY / **LABEL:** STATIC CARAVAN RECORDS / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

H. P. Lovecraft's work has inspired some of the most fantastic art since the author's death; from movie adaptations and comic books to homages in rock band lyrics (and, indeed, band names). This collaboration between a duo that predominately make imagined soundtracks and acclaimed actor Laurence R. Harvey - primarily known

for his horror films, but an incredibly versatile performer - instantly grabs the listener from its moody introduction.

With Harvey performing the stories with an intense timbre that counterpoints the electronic backing, two of Lovecraft's tales are told here - albeit in a specially adapted form (by poet John 'The Baptist' Toher). Side One contains one of the author's better-known pieces, largely due to the fantastic Stuart Gordon film, *From Beyond*, while the flipside features *The Hound*.

From the very start, a sinister and ominous mood is set. The mix of synth sounds on the score evokes images of a John Carpenter-type scale while Harvey's delivery has the tone and urgency one would expect from someone recounting happenings as outlandish and horrific as those that occur at the Tillinghast laboratory. When the experiment gets underway in *The Machine*, both the music and voice take on a different dimension, drawing the listener into the world of heightened senses. The exhilaration and threat are palpable, a feeling that continues with the groovy *Negative Forces*. A mournful *Lament* brings the first tale to a close with an entirely satisfying piano riff complementing the fractured mind of the unnamed narrator.

The *Hound*, on the other hand,

begins with bigger beats. The unearthly recitation is almost sung. It soon settles (or to be more accurate, unsettles) into an incredibly atmospheric story involving body snatching and throbbing rhythms, that build on the simple patterns to a riveting pulse, once again adding a cinematic aura to the reading. Both stories benefit from the lack of traditional storytelling techniques such as sound effects or additional voices. Here, they'd be too distracting against the frenzied synths. It's as though we're sat around a campfire with the narrator, hearing the ghastly tales first-hand, while listening to an '80s horror film score.

Not only does this release celebrate an author whose work has influenced all manner of arts in the years following the conception, but it also sits well as a moody and absorbing listen. Harvey's voice emits both a calming resonance and a sinister and unsettling aura. Lovecraft's words seem to come easily for the actor, certainly not sounding as clumsy or archaic as some recitals of material from this period. As the release is a very limited edition, we suggest getting your order in now.

MARTIN UNSWORTH





L I S T E N

WWW.BIGFINISH.COM

[@BIGFINISH](#)

[fTHEBIGFINISH](#)

OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK



THE FOREST

MUSIC BY BEAR McCREARY

t's award season, which means that we're looking at the 'Best Original Score' nominations and winners, and wondering why the hell so much of what we like never gets credited. Be it the Golden Globes, the Oscars, or the BAFTAs, the scores recognised always seem to be your standard orchestral works, despite the fact that the most original music being done always falls far afield. Basically, we're just upset that *Ex Machina*'s score by Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury was utterly ignored, despite being one of the most effective and original scores in recent memory.

While we're happy to see that Ennio Morricone's score for the Quentin Tarantino western *The Hateful Eight* won the Golden Globe, we're absolutely puzzled as to how it managed to get an Academy Award nomination. We were fairly vocal about how ridiculous we found it that Antonio Sanchez's *Birdman* score was excluded last year, due to the inclusion of a few classical pieces. Given that Morricone has openly

admitted that three of the cues in the film were composed for another film (John Carpenter's *The Thing*), it just seems like the rule regarding pre-existing music is so vague as to be arbitrarily enforced at the whim of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This is before one even looks at *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, and how much of Williams' work refers to the six scores previously composed in the series.

Additionally, we also have to admit it's rather odd to be looking at the Oscars' 'Best Original Song' category, and there being absolutely nothing from an animated film in there.

In news of new releases, Bear McCreary has two scores out now that take the composer away from the small screen and into the theatre. While McCreary has done film work previously, his musical output for the better part of the last five years has been for genre television, such as *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *The Cape*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *The Walking Dead*. Now, he has two horror

scores: for the haunted woods movie *The Forest*, and the creepy doll flick, *The Boy* (not to be confused with the 2015 film of the same name), and they're rather excellent. McCreary's also been announced as the composer for J. J. Abrams' upcoming *10 Cloverfield Lane*, the particulars of which – both score and plot – remain mysterious.

The Forest, out digitally from Sparks & Shadows, utilises chimes and pounding drums in equal measures to create an eerie, yet pulse-pounding score. It regularly surprises, yet always in an entertaining and effective way. *The Boy*, out digitally and on compact disc from Lakeshore Records, is a novel take on the haunted house way of doing things. This is to say that there's a lot of strings and piano playing against one another. The subtle electronic elements of the score are brought to the fore in the album's single, *In My Dreams*, which was written by the composer's brother, Brendan, and performed by Fye Monroe.

Milan Records will soon release the Mark Korven score for the highly anticipated horror film, *The Witch*. The one track posted online in advance of the score's digital release (just about the time you're putting eyes on this page) is so tense and discomforting – all spooky voices and scraped strings – we're almost too scared to seek out the complete score. Milan also released the Junkie XL score for the long awaited *Deadpool* film, which dropped digitally the same day the film was released. In addition to the score, the album features songs used in the film, from Juice Newton's *Angel of the Morning* to DMX's *X Gon' Give It To Ya*.

Junkie XL went from never having composed a single score ever to having three very high profile releases in just



one year. In addition to last year's **Mad Max: Fury Road** and this year's **Deadpool**, he's also teamed with Hans Zimmer for **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**. It seems like a strange pairing, and we keep hearing some not-so-great things about the film, but if the pairing of Marco Beltrami and Philip Glass for last year's amazing score to the atrocious **Fantastic Four** film proved anything, it's that great music can come from unexpected places. Fingers crossed. It's due out from WaterTower Music in mid-March.

Speaking of strange mash-ups, Fernando Velázquez last did the beautiful-if-empty Guillermo del Toro haunted house flick **Crimson Peak**, and returns with another bit of horror for the adaptation of Jane Austen-meets-**Night of the Living Dead** novel, **Pride and Prejudice and Zombies**. It's out now via Varèse Sarabande, both digitally and on CD. We're hoping for something rather more rousing than **Crimson Peak** offered us, but given that Velázquez also did the rather-underrated score for the Dwayne Johnson **Hercules** film, we have every bit of faith he's the man for the job.

When Ship to Shore Phonograph Company first came onto the scene, we thought we had them solidly pegged as a re-release label for beloved quirky B-movies like **Class of Nuke 'Em High** and **Manos: The Hands of Fate**. Since then, they've blown our minds with the first non-Japanese vinyl release to cult classic video game **Mother**, and now they've even gotten beyond re-releases to put out the first physical release of Tom Happ's score to his massively successful indie video game, **Axiom Verge**. Bridging the gap as it does between chiptune and electronic dance music, Happ's score sold out of its limited 'Axiom Disruptor' red/orange sunburst vinyl variant almost immediately, and who knows how many purple vinyl copies will be left by the time you read this.

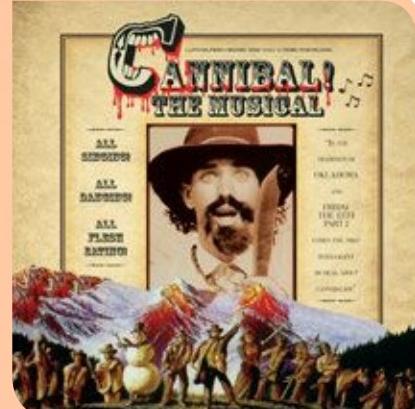
In the realm of re-releases, life is absolutely grand. Intrada has put out Charles Bernstein's score to the film adaptation of Stephen King's mad dog novel **Cujo**. In addition to the originally-recorded mixes, the compact disc reissue includes five alternate tracks.



The label also premiered on CD the very cool and swinging Paul Glass score to Otto Preminger's **Bunny Lake Is Missing**. While the original RCA LP release had just the Glass score, this reissue not only has that in its entirety, but also the three songs by The Zombies featured in the film. We dig the original album art as done by Saul Bass, as well.

We were excited to see that Enjoy the Ride's Enjoy the Toons sub-label was putting out a **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** 7-inch. The keyword there is 'were', because rather than original music from the cartoon, as we originally believed, or even from the **Turtles In Time** video game, as we thought on second look, it is in fact a tribute record. It's even a tribute record done by the same group of musicians who did last year's Doug & the Beets' **Welcome to Bluffington** 7-inch. Frankly, we think getting excited about a cover record is kind of bogus, especially given the crazy amount of actual game and cartoon music being released these days, but if you like it, have it.

However, what's absolutely amazing is the fact that we have another Tromano-related release out, courtesy of the brand new label Banana Stand Records. They've released the **Cannibal! The Musical** soundtrack on limited edition vinyl LP, which also marks the first time the music from the creators of **South Park** has been readily available legally for over fifteen years. It's a pressing of 1000 on red vinyl, and we're hoping for some more awesome releases from this fresh new label.



For those looking to get more Repeated Viewing in their world, the man also known as Alan Sinclair will see the vinyl release of his **Three Sisters'** score on WeMe/Wil-Ru very soon. It's out now on compact disc, but one can't help but want this on giallo yellow vinyl. The same desire for interesting media goes for his **Street Force** cassette, due out around the same time on tape label Spun Out of Control. We spoke with Mr. Sinclair about these new releases, especially curious as to how he came to score **Three Sisters**.

"The director, Dáire McNab, dropped me a line shortly after I posted a few tracks on my Bandcamp page and asked if I'd consider letting him use some of my music in his movie," explained Sinclair. "He did an early edit of a scene using one of my tracks which tickled me somewhat so it was a no-brainer. I have to say the fact that Giovanni Lombardo Radice was involved also played a part in making my mind up - not a bad scoop for a giallo homage. Dáire's super-talented and a very nice guy, so the whole process was great."

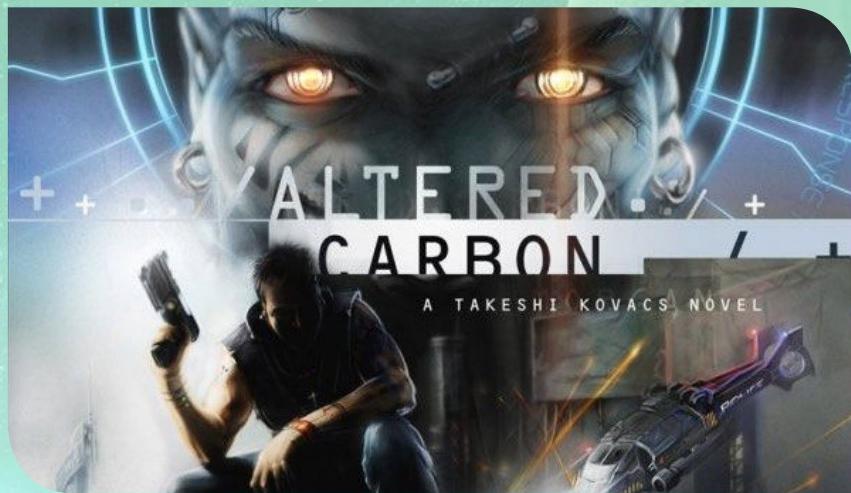
We were hoping that, given the exceptional uptick in Repeated Viewing releases, we might soon see live performances of this rather excellent film score music. It might not be too far away, teases Sinclair.

"I technically retired myself from live gigs about 4 years ago - not really sure why, but I think I was a bit fed up after years of lugging gear around for minimal reward - what a grump," Sinclair says. "Another local band has actually offered some assistance in performing my tracks live - that might be interesting."

As it's not completely off the radar, watch this space. We're all about seeing as much of this music in person as we can. Speaking of which: if you live in or around Birmingham, Clint Mansell will perform an evening entitled *Uneasy Listening* at the Birmingham Symphony Hall on March 23rd. Tickets are reasonably priced, and anyone who's heard the live performance Q2 Music presented online from the Church of St. Paul the Apostle in New York City should be drooling at the possibility. With all enthusiasm, we think you should attend.

BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS
YOU THE LATEST
NEWS FROM
THE WORLD OF
GENRE LITERATURE



ALTERED CARBON Comes To Netflix

Netflix, the online streaming service company that encourages young people to 'chill and watch movies', has just acquired rights to **Altered Carbon**, a 10-episode series based on the award-winning 2002 novel of the same name by Richard K. Morgan.

Altered Carbon is set in a far future where human beings can upload their minds into new bodies, a process called resleeving. It follows the story of an old soldier who uncovers a complex military/police conspiracy. The project was originally intended for the motion picture treatment, but a recent growth of interest in science fiction has prompted development into this current project.

French Festival Fails To Acknowledge Women

The Angoulême Comics Festival in France, one of the world's biggest comic-book festivals, caused controversy by neglecting to include any women in their lifetime achievement awards list. Several prominent comic creators have pulled out of the festival in protest. In Angoulême's 43-year history, just one woman, the French artist Florence Cestac, has won the Grand Prix lifetime achievement award.

Pullman Pull Out Prompts Boycott

Northern Lights creator Philip Pullman resigned as patron of the Oxford Literary Festival in protest at its refusal to pay authors. He announced his resignation via Twitter, saying: "Because of the Oxford Literary Festival's attitude to paying speakers (they don't) I can't remain as a Patron any longer. I've resigned." In a further tweet, he added "They never have and I've long tried to persuade them to, but they won't. Time to go." Authors Linda Grant, Louisa Young, Joanne Harris and Francesca Simon have voiced their support for Pullman, and an online petition has begun.

Hugo Award Nominations Open

The window to nominate science fiction books (and other media) for a prestigious Hugo Award has now opened. The rocket shaped prizes are a highly regarded mark of excellence amongst science fiction writers and fans. To be able to submit a nomination, you need to have membership World Science Fiction Society, which anyone can join by booking membership for Worldcon. Fans who are so inclined are encourage to do so, and vote with their hearts.

Sad Puppy Supremos Refuse Peace Offering

The Sad Puppy movement is a loose association of science fiction authors who courted controversy last year by block voting at the 2015 Hugo Awards. This developed into full blown bickering between authors along broadly political lines, The Sad Puppy's being a mostly conservative concern railing against the liberal and progressive growth the Hugo Awards have recently enjoyed. George R. R. Martin, a lifelong follower of the Hugo Awards and firm opponent against the Puppies, recently requested reconciliation between

the factions. Alas, prominent Puppy advocates have rebuffed these overtures. Kate Paultk said "Since the person in question hasn't bothered to make this offer to me, Sarah Hoyt, or Amanda Green, Sad Puppy supporters can reasonably assume that the so-called offer is not actually genuine." John C Wright added "Perhaps Mr. Martin can see a means whereby the host and the parasite that forever seeks to destroy the host can coexist in peace. I, for one, cannot..." The controversy is likely to continue as long as it drives sales.

HARRY POTTER Star Starts Book Club

Emma Watson, best known for her role as the bookish Hermione Granger in the **Harry Potter** adaptations has announced that she is to start a Feminist Book Club, called Our Shared Shelf. The club includes celebrities such as Taylor Swift and J. K. Rowling.

WINDS OF WINTER Misses TV Deadline

George R. R. Martin's latest instalment of the **A Song of Ice and Fire** series, **The Winds of Winter**, will not be out before HBO's **Game of Thrones** TV series airs this year. The hit TV show is based on Martin's books. In news that has surprised very few, Martin announced "I blew the Halloween deadline, and I've now blown the end of the year deadline. And that almost certainly means that no, **The Winds of Winter** will not be published before the sixth season of **Game of Thrones** premieres in April."

David G Hartwell 1941 - 2016

Editor David G. Hartwell, 74, died January 20th, 2016 from a head trauma following a fall. Hartwell was one of science fiction's most renowned editors, with an unsurpassed knowledge of the genre and industry, and a unique and distinctive personal style.

Hartwell edited thousands of books for the great and good of the science fiction industry. He was nominated for a Hugo Award 41 times and won the World Fantasy Award for editing twice. A full list of the books he edited and his achievements would easily fill the pages of this column and beyond; the industry has lost a true giant. He is survived by his wife and children.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

ED FORTUNE
HIGHLIGHTS
NOTEWORTHY
NEW TITLES

COMING SOON



IN THE LABYRINTH OF DRAKES: A MEMOIR BY LADY TRENT

AUTHOR: MARIE BRENNAN
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 5TH

Asimov Award-winning author Marie Brennan is at it again with the fourth part of her Lady Trent memoirs. Lady Trent, an expert in the subject of dragons, has now wangled herself a position in the Royal Scirling Army in order to continue her work. Not only must she deal with foreign saboteurs endangering both her work and her well-being, she must also explore the Labyrinth of Drakes to discover more about these fascinating winged lizards. Of course, more adventure and discovery awaits.



ELEMENTARY: BLOOD AND INK

AUTHOR: ADAM CHRISTOPHER
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 26TH

Adam Christopher is rather good at wry and witty detective stories, and his work on the Elementary books has certainly delivered. **Blood and Ink** begins with the murder of a hedge fund's Chief Financial Officer, killed by a fountain pen, no less. Holmes and Watson discover a link between the victim and a charismatic touring management guru. With large sums of money on the line and the main suspect a skilled liar and charlatan, is everything truly as clear cut as it seems, or is there a deeper conspiracy for these re-imagined detectives to look in to?



HORIZON WARS: 6MM HARD SCIENCE-FICTION WARGAMES

AUTHORS: ROBEY JENKINS
RELEASE DATE: OSPREY BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 19TH

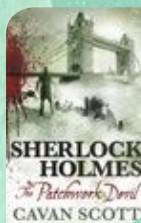
Osprey is a publisher better known for its piercing and insightful military history books, which tend to be meticulously researched and well-illustrated. **Horizon Wars** is only a slight departure for them; it's a sci-fi wargaming manual. The book attempts to predict what warfare will be like in the future, and gives guidelines on how to simulate these conflicts on a table top with very small models. Given Osprey's reputation for quality, and the book's creators dedication to creating fun yet informative games, we look forward to the results. Illustrated by Jessada Sutthi.



ARENA

AUTHOR: HOLLY JENNINGS
PUBLISHER: ACE
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 7TH

With the line between video games and reality ever blurring, the future is one where competitive gaming is every bit as real as more physical sports. **Arena** follows the path of Kali Ling, who fights to the death on national TV. She's died many times, but luckily, it's all a video game. Unfortunately, though death is digital, the pain is real. Every bloody kill is broadcast to millions. Every player is a modern gladiator - leading a life of ultimate fame, responsible only for entertaining the masses. When one of her companions overdoses, she embarks on an investigation and the lines between reality and the game blur ever more.



SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE PATCHWORK DEVIL

AUTHOR: CAVAN SCOTT
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 22ND

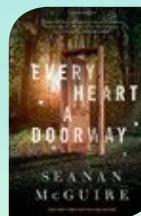
Cavan Scott is better known for his work on **Doctor Who** and fantasy spin-off factory, **Pathfinder**, but he really does have a flair for stories involving everyone's favourite consulting detective. As the world awaits the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Holmes and Watson are called to a singular mystery. A severed hand has been found on the banks of the Thames, a hand belonging to a soldier who apparently died in the trenches. Not only is the hand still fresh, but clues point to something much more sinister.



THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK - THE ORIGINAL TOPPS TRADING CARD SERIES, VOL. 2

AUTHOR: GARY GERANI
PUBLISHER: ABRAMS BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 19TH

Some memorabilia is simply impossible to get your hands on. The Topps bubblegum cards for the **Star Wars** movies are a particularly good example. In 1980 Topps released three new series of cards to coincide with the release of **The Empire Strikes Back** and this book collects all 352 cards and 88 stickers in a single deluxe volume. Reproducing the fronts and backs of each card, this collection includes character profiles, story cards, movie facts, quotes, trivia, and puzzles from **Episode V**. The only thing it's missing is the bubblegum smell.



EVERY HEART A DOORWAY

AUTHOR: SEANAN MCGUIRE
PUBLISHER: TOR
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 5TH

McGuire's latest book is based on an interesting premise. What happens to all those children who slipped between the cracks of reality and find themselves in another world, after they've had their marvellous adventure? Apparently, they all find themselves at Eleanor West's Home for Wayward Children. When yet another mysterious girl arrives, things take a turn for the even stranger. With every child in the building desperate to return to the lands that made them special, the place swiftly becomes a powder keg, and wackiness ensues.



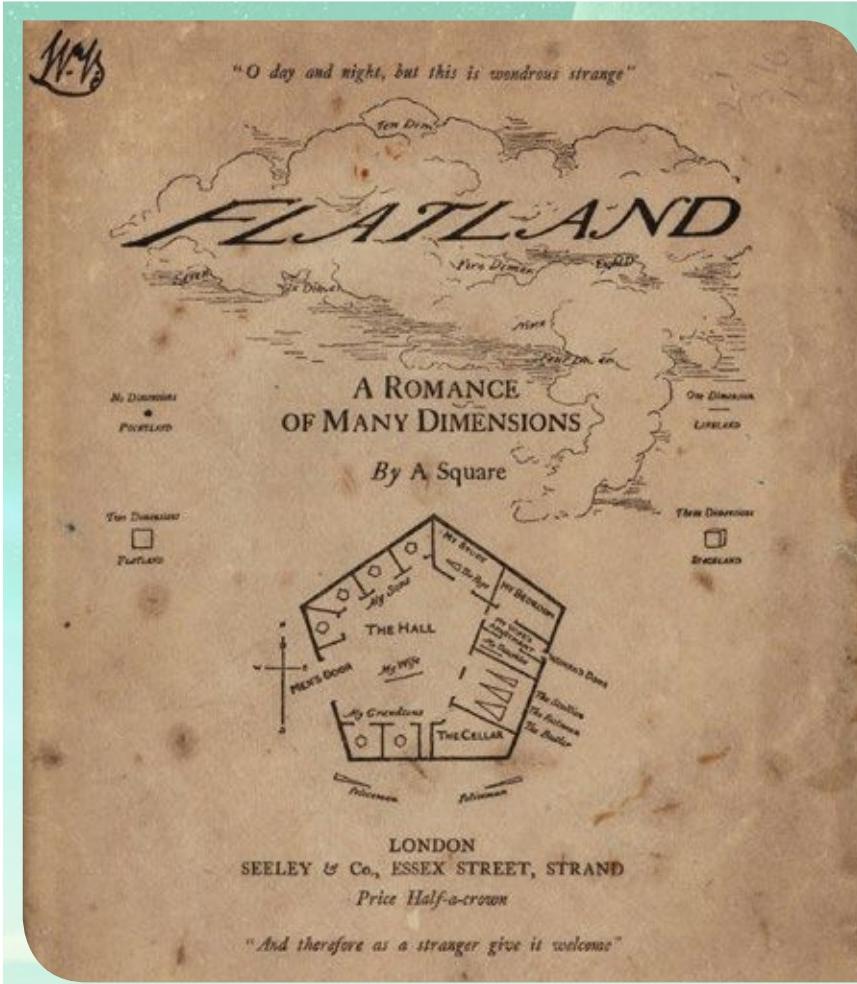
SLEEPING GIANTS

AUTHOR: SYLVAIN NEUVEL
PUBLISHER: MICHAEL JOSEPH
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 21ST

Sleeping Giants is a sci-fi fantasy novel that has already been grabbed by the literary establishment as one of their own. The book tells the tale of a bizarre artefact that appears to be some sort of weird giant metal hand. Told in a 'documentary/investigation' style, this is a tale about mankind's struggle to find the balance between knowledge and power, and is already getting a mountain of praise from both genre and mainstream types.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



There's hard sci-fi, and then there's FLATLAND: A ROMANCE IN MANY DIMENSIONS...

It's hard to describe Edwin A. Abbott's 1884 novel. Split into two parts, the first half is a description of Flatland, its landscape and people and social structure. The second half is about the adventure our narrator (a Square) has after a Sphere materialises in his two-dimensional house. It's part satire, part textbook and all science fiction, and is probably the weirdest thing I've ever read. And I've read *Ubu Roi*.

The first thing that struck me about the book was just how subtle the satire is. Some of it is obviously ridiculous: the higher on the social ladder you are, the more space you take up, with women being straight lines and priests being circles; women are literally dangerous, and have to approach people with a 'peace-cry', so they don't accidentally gore someone with their

pointy ends; irregular shapes are looked on with suspicion and derision, and if allowed to live, work as government clerks. But most of the satire is so close to the real Victorian belief that it's more frustrating to read than funny. The 'divine origin' of the monarchy and the class system is actually something people once believed. They did think that women were genetically inferior to men. And any irregularity - any disability or nonconformity - was derided and hidden and even exterminated. Sometimes it's hard to remember that this is mocking at all, and to top it off it's barely present in the second part of the book! Abbott tells us all about Flatland's rules but never shows them in action. He's committed a classic writing mistake.

Where the satire should be in the second

half, we instead have an uptick in the novel's action and intricate discussions of the existence of multiple dimensions. If your favourite part of science fiction is the science, then you're going to love it. What I found fascinating was how Abbott presented these discussions. The Sphere moves from his home dimension (the Third Dimension) to Flatland by moving downward - descending from the sky into the Square's living room. He then presents 'the Gospel of the Three Dimensions' to the Square, who he calls his 'apostle'. It's made clear that the Sphere is not God, but after the Square receives the dimensional revelation, he does go on a classic apostle journey: he tries to share what he's learned from his teacher, is persecuted, and refers to himself as a martyr. He is also so inspired by the Sphere's gospel that he decides to build on it, positing the idea of a Fourth Dimension. Abbott uses religious language and narrative to get across the size and scope of the information the Sphere is sharing. This isn't just a theory; this alters the fabric of the Square's entire being. It's an interesting narrative device, and an unexpected one, but maybe it shouldn't be. After all, in Abbott's Victorian home, science and religious belief were still trying to reconcile.

As someone who has never excelled in math or science, I'm genuinely surprised that I wish this book were longer. The prose may be dense and the subject matter a little dry, but I was excited by the action of the novel's second half. And I wanted more of it: more action, more character, and more satire. More emotion and more of the Flatland that Abbot spent thirty pages promising me I would see. Character and plot can be vehicles for discussion, but that shouldn't be their only job. If Abbott's multi-dimensional theory is taken away, the story should still be able to stand reasonably well on its own. I think Abbott became so wrapped up in his theories that he forgot what kind of novel he had set up: an exploration, not just of the places the Square had never been, but of Flatland.

Flatland: A Romance in Many Dimensions is one of the most unique books I've ever read and a piece every sci-fi fan should consider. Its subject matter may seem intimidating to right brain readers (like me), but it is surprisingly accessible and takes you down roads you wouldn't think a book about shapes would go down. You can also find *Flatland* on film, as a 1965 animated short and two 2007 animated films, one of which stars the voices of Kristen Bell and Martin Sheen.

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS NOVELISATION
AUTHOR: ALAN DEAN FOSTER / PUBLISHER:
LUCASBOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW



THE X-FILES: THE OFFICIAL COLLECTION VOLUME ONE
AUTHOR & PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To capitalise on the new miniseries of the sci-fi hit, Titan Comics have meticulously put together original X-Files Magazine

There's a line credited to Harrison Ford when he was working on the first Star Wars picture. If you're a bit of an anorak you probably know what the line is already, but we're going to just tell the story quickly. When reading George Lucas' dialogue about schematics and strategies, he told the director 'you can type this shit, George, but you can't say it'. This book feels at times like it hasn't had that chat yet.

It seems pretty evident that either Foster was working from an earlier draft of the script, or he had a low word count and needed to sex it up a little. The main offender is Finn by a country mile. It's a testament to how well the character is sketched out on screen that the reader can look at the page and realise how jarring some of his dialogue is. For example, 'any kind of internal defense, much less something as nebulous as a gas counterattack, would be the last thing a squad sent to take its crew into custody would expect'. We can't remember every line of dialogue from the

film, but if that's something he actually said then we will gladly eat a crow. In nearly every instance the dialogue is longer and somehow clumsier than its on-screen counterpart.

The best novelisations expand on what's on screen and can help to make a good film even better. They provide more depth to the characters and backstory. This time around, that approach doesn't really work. The main reason for this is the inescapable sense that really, Foster doesn't really know what's going on any more than we do. Without the ability to really get into the meat of the story, we are left with a novelisation that reads like a mere embellished transcript of the film.

Foster writes well, but the fact that he didn't have a lot to work with really harms the book. We'll certainly be re-reading it in future, but if you've already seen the film you're not missing out on much.

SCOTT VARNHAM



articles and published them altogether in this new book; *The X-Files: The Official Collection Volume One*.

Focusing on the agents, the bureau and the Syndicate, the book consists mainly of interviews, behind-the-scenes titbits and in-depth features. It has a plethora of different subjects, ranging from interviews with David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, to the history of the FBI (including real accounts from former agents).

Thankfully, Titan Comics haven't just haphazardly thrown a whole bunch of articles together for a quick buck. They have carefully managed to pick out some of the standout features originally published in the magazine, and presented them on glossy paper, gloriously showing off the photos of the cast and show.

The interviews in the book are decently sized, and there's almost enough range for avid fans of *The X-Files*. The book doesn't showcase only the main characters, but it has entire pages devoted to lesser-known individuals in the series, such as Agent Doggett's second-in-command, Agent Crane (who appeared in just 5 episodes).

Some readers may believe there are a few glaring omissions with the interviews though. There's no sign of the Lone Gunmen throughout the book, which

almost seems unforgivable considering their importance with the agents, and the same can be said for Mr X and Deep Throat. All had their fair share of exposure during the series, so it just feels a little odd that they're not referenced.

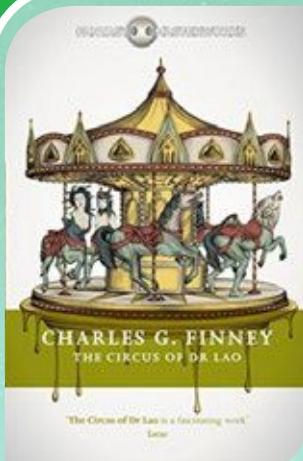
There's a much stronger focus towards characters that appear later on, but readers will at least be able to sneer at Krycek throughout the selection of pages. Also, there's a great section devoted to one of the most important characters of the show – The Smoking Man. All in all, those features will still appease enthusiasts.

Towards the end of the volume, more articles reflect back on the series as a whole. Mulder and Scully's relationship is touched upon in a neatly put together piece, along with the top 20 moments of the series and a rundown of every single episode.

Thankfully, *The X-Files: The Official Collection Volume One* is a welcome addition to the long list of *X-Files* books. Fans will be more than happy with the overall content, as it's a carefully crafted publication. The second volume, focusing on the monsters and aliens, is set to be a great companion piece.

MATT WELLS





THE CIRCUS OF DR LAO
AUTHOR: CHARLES G. FINNEY
PUBLISHER: GOLLANZC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When an enigmatic little Chinaman called Dr Lao visits the sleepy dustbowl town of Abalone, Arizona, and announces he is opening a circus, it immediately stirs up interest in the depressed population. As the townsfolk watch Dr Lao lead a parade of three carriages through the Main Street, they can't believe their eyes - there's a sphinx, a gigantic snake, a satyr and... is that a bear in the cage or a Russian? It seems as if no-one can agree upon what they just saw. But stranger is to come - there's also a chimera, a snake-haired Medusa hungry to turn the unwary to stone, a mythical fortune teller condemned to speak only the truth, and - for the finale - a cast of thousands primed to sacrifice a beautiful young woman to a vengeful

pagan god.

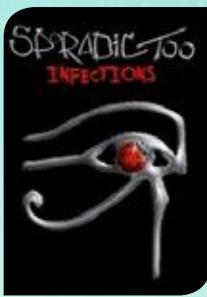
The Circus of Dr Lao was first published in 1935, but reads as if it was written yesterday and it moves at an exhilarating pace. Finney's writing is superb. Dr Lao, his incredible mythological menagerie and an impressive cross-section of Abalone's residents are all perfectly rendered in a tale which combines fantasy, mystery and - in one particular sequence - weird eroticism underpinned by some vicious satire and black humour. In fact, much of the dialogue - particularly from Dr Lao - is delivered in such a nonsensical and hypnotically sing-song style that the effect is rather like reading a Dr Seuss story for adults. Overly sensitive readers might pick up on one or two expressions Finney

uses which - let's say - were commonplace in 1935 but aren't very PC today, but that's no reason to pass this by.

The novel was adapted into a terrific 1964 movie called *7 Faces of Dr Lao* (why isn't this on DVD in the UK?) and inspired - among many others - Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. It's easy to understand why. Although its story (what there is of it) is deceptively slight (a whole new subplot had to be added to bulk out the film adaptation), *The Circus of Dr Lao* is an experience you shouldn't miss and a trip into the dark heart of a Big Top you will never forget.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★ 10



SPORADIC TOO: INFECTIONS
AUTHOR: KNEEL DOWNE
PUBLISHER: LULU.COM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's been sixteen months since the last release from Twitter superstar Downe, the anthology Sporadic, and in the meantime, he's kept busy with his twisted world of words in his realm of 140 characters.

"It rubs the poem on its skin

or else it gets the prose again..."

With this follow-up book, he once again collects his Twitter writing into a more manageable, easy-to-read format, once again containing references and hints as to what's happening in his VirulentBlurb Universe and beyond. While one may say this is 'more of the same', we'd counter with 'meet the new boss, same as the old boss'. And that's in no way a bad thing. The style may stay the same, but the song has plenty of new beats. The influence of pop culture is as prevalent as usual (and never hidden nor shied away from). This is a celebration, and in no means derivative or weak sauce. Opening the book with a tribute to Lemmy, the frontman of Motörhead, and formally of Hawkwind, is suitably fitting, particularly as the latter have

played such a key role in shaping the words of Downe's world. One could almost imagine the soundtrack to his Universe being *Warrior on the Edge of Time*. Later on, another fallen hero is saluted, of course, as The Thin White Duke is similarly a pivotal character in the world that the author has created. As Bowie did, Downe is constantly reinvigorating the environment of the story; creating new vistas on which to build new tales, while keeping the same standard of quality throughout.

In keeping with the foundation of the prose, grammar and spelling take on their own life, perhaps something purists may struggle with, but anyone who has spent long enough on the social media site will soon understand and appreciate the style and, indeed, the immediacy of the work. These are intentional and

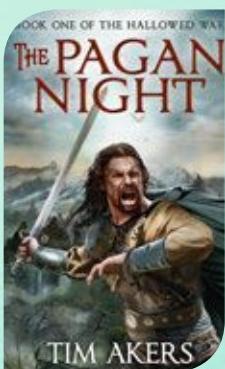
add to the otherworldliness of the writing, helping the reader be transported to a different world, just as Burgess' *Nadsat* did back in 1962.

As with the first volume of Sporadic, this is a perfect jumping-in point for people unsure as to whether to take the plunge into the weird and wonderful world of Kneel Downe. The taste of his fractured creation will be enough to lure you onto the other books. And if they are too dense, there's plenty of micro-tales and poems that are bound to bring a smile to any face. This is prose that is easily accessible, and that could very well be on a school syllabus decades from now.

"I am 140 characters... yet none of them are me".

MARTIN UNSWORTH

★★★★★ 10



THE PAGAN NIGHT
AUTHOR: TIM AKERS
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Pagan Night is the first book in The Hallowed War epic fantasy series. It is being marketed to fans of Robin Hobb and Peter V. Brett. The novel focuses on character development whilst the plot moves forward, setting up the series for an epic story.

Tim Akers is a well-established author, having published most notably the steampunk series, *The Burn Cycle*. However, fans of high fantasy may be unknown to this author. This novel can be seen as Tim Akers first entry into the world of epic fantasy. Whilst writing his

other novels, Tim focused on this series, developing it over a decade, and it shows in the extent of the story.

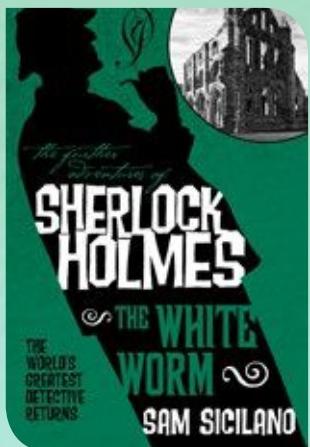
The story follows Malcolm Blakley when a war breaks out and he struggles to contain the violence. Whilst most stories of epic fantasy may go down a different route, Akers has created a tale central to religion. Whilst this is seen in many modern epic fantasies, Akers makes it a central and interesting part of the story. The novel features all the normal characters that seem essential to epic fantasy. The novel takes a political approach, much like Robin

Hobbs' novels, as well as focusing on characterisation.

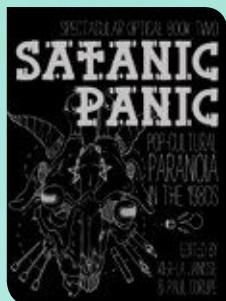
The does develop some interesting plot threads throughout, and the contrast between the northern religion and the south is explored in detail. It is a complex tale, which fans of epic fantasy will be grateful for. Among the many others entering the genre, this one is set to be a standout of the year. A tale of religious conflicts and cleverly drafted characters, and a must for all epic fantasy fans.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★ 8



SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE WHITE WORM
AUTHOR: SAM SICILIANO
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW



SATANIC PANIC
EDITORS: K. JANISSE, P. CORUPE
PUBLISHER: SPECTACULAR OPTICAL
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Back in the 80s, soon after Ronnie Reagan became president, Christian fundamentalist types in America started to look around at the ungodly Heavy Metal music, D&D games, VHS horror movies, pulp paperbacks and even children's

When it comes to Sherlock Holmes books, Titan do not have a track record for hitting it out of the park every time. The White Worm sadly continues this trend.

It's another outing for Sherlock Holmes in which Dr Henry Vernier takes the place of Watson for some reason. We appreciate the attempt at a new perspective, but it doesn't really help to make the book more interesting. Even with the addition of a giant worm, the mystery is fairly boring. Vernier spends most of the novel either pining for his wife or being incredulous about things. Sometimes both. The only really interesting part of it is the romantic subplot, with an intriguing secret behind it. True, the eventual explanation

for this boils down to 'well, ain't Victorian society a hell of a thing?' but we found it a pleasant diversion from an otherwise turgid story.

Though pedestrian, it's written well enough and maintains what limp plot it has at a satisfying pace. We liked the fact that the book avoided that annoying 'I must gather my suspects in the accusing parlor before I reveal all' approach taken by so many other Sherlockian outings. When Vernier thinks Sherlock knows what's going on, he asks for an answer and gets it. That was nice to read.

The association with another classic work of literature (it's based partially on Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm*) isn't

enough to save this. It's hard to imagine what could be. We're not saying it's bad. It's simply boring, which is almost worse. We read all the way through but didn't really feel like that it was worth it. You don't have to look far for better Sherlock Holmes books. Titan themselves do another *Further Adventures* range which has about a 50% hit rate. Alternatively you could seek out many of the other Sherlock books out there; lord knows there are so many these days it's difficult to know where to start. But after reading this review, hopefully you'll know where to stop.

SCOTT VARNHAM



Saturday morning cartoons, and saw in them the work of the Devil. Pretty soon the media began to spread the word that evil was being fed into the hearts and minds (and souls) of America's youth. A 'Satanic Panic' of extraordinary magnitude seized hold, first in the USA, then in England and other countries. Pop culture of all types was blamed for the evils of society, fingers were pointed, and lives were ruined as a widespread hysteria took hold.

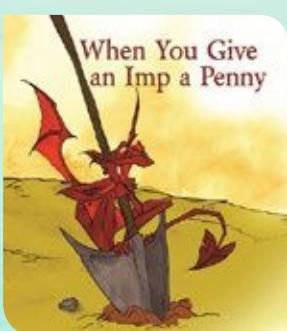
Satanic Panic is a collection of twenty essays by writers on pop culture that tells how the media in all its forms fed into the furor. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas remembers Michelle Remembers, the lurid memoir of Satanic Ritual Abuse that kick-started the whole panic on its publication in 1980. Honorary Church of Satan member (and respected

author of numerous books on the history of occultism) Gavin Baddeley investigates the crusade against Role Play Games by various religious lobbies; Alison Lang provides an account of the Geraldo Rivera Devil Worship TV special that fanned the flames of the whole damned thing in America in 1988; Stacy Rusnak surveys the demonisation of MTV and the music video; Samm Deighan essays Heavy Metal and Devil worship in 1980s cult cinema, while David Bertrand examines the antidotal rise of Christian metal and punk (does anyone actually remember Stryper?); Kevin L. Ferguson looks at how films like *Evilspeak* (1981) and *976-EVIL* (1988) contributed to the home video panic. Finally, Kurt Halford eases us out of the brouhaha with a look at Joe Dante's 1989 satirical comedy *The 'Burbs*.

Considerations of space prevent further writers from being mentioned here, but all offer informative, insightful pieces.

By the end of the 1990s when Satanic Panic had died down and sociologists had reached the conclusion that Satanic Ritual Abuse had little or no factual basis, uncomfortable truths nevertheless began to emerge. In their eagerness to find a satanic cult connection, social workers often missed real cases of child abuse and pedophile rings, as events of recent years have made depressingly clear. Superstition and prejudice can blind the public to genuine social evils, as this fascinating book reveals, when really the only devils at work are folk ones.

JON TOWLSON



WHEN YOU GIVE AN IMP A PENNY
AUTHORS: HENRY HERZ, JOSH HERZ,
HARRISON HERZ
ILLUSTRATOR: ABIGAIL LARSON
PUBLISHER: PELICAN PUBLISHING
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When You Give An Imp A Penny by Henry, Josh and Harrison Herz is a short children's story book about... well the title pretty much tells you what the story is about.

As with the majority of children's storybooks the narrative is straightforward. An imp borrows a spade to bury his penny in a garden and it makes such a mess carrying out this most simple of tasks that the gardens owner asks the imp to tidy up after itself. The imp borrows a broom to sweep up the mess and accidentally sets it on fire, and the more he tries to tidy his mess, the more havoc and calamity ensues, until

he leaves the owner of the messy house and garden with a bag of gold coins. Which begs the question, why did the imp need to bury the penny if he can conjure riches at will. As charming as the story is, this is one of two stumbling blocks in this tale, the fact that there seems to be no discernible logic with regard to the conjuring of riches. The other being that the text, whilst being serviceable, is somewhat flat.

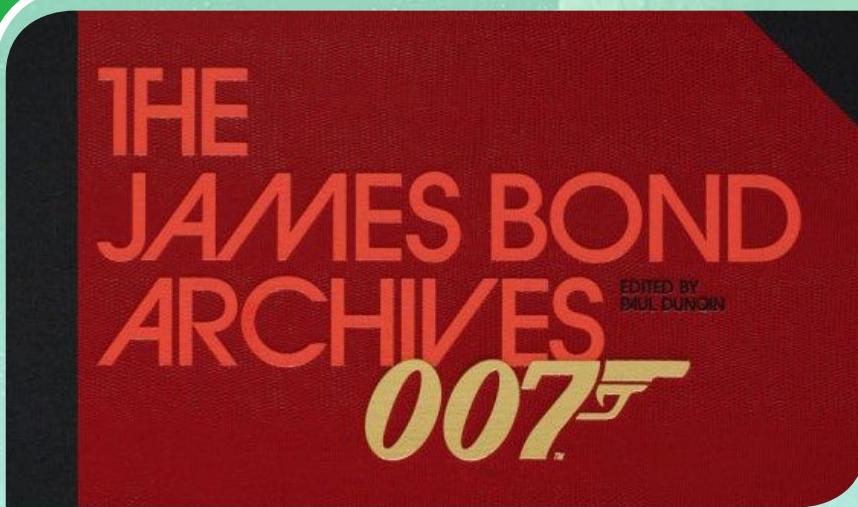
Gruffalo and Stick Man creator Julia Donaldson is renowned for her children's tales. That's because her narrative, whilst gently rhyming, comes alive and is

instantly memorable to the child that is reading the story, or, as is often the case with this reviewer, reading the story to their child. This didn't prove to be the case with *When You Give An Imp A Penny*.

However, Abigail Larson's artwork is a feast for the eyes. Her illustrations have the quality of '90s era Disney animation. It's such a shame that the story, as charming as it is, doesn't match the sumptuous art. Still, very young children will no doubt find the tale briefly delightful.

CHRISTIAN JONES





THE JAMES BOND ARCHIVES (SPECTRE EDITION)

AUTHOR: PAUL DUNCAN / PUBLISHER: TASCHEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Where once upon a time, outside of the reprints of the Ian Fleming novels, books about superspy 007 were scarce, this is the 21st century and with the renewed interest generated by the Daniel Craig era it will come as no surprise that yet another definitive guide, *The James Bond Archives*, has just been updated to include a section on SPECTRE.

So with a huge number of these definitive tomes on the Eon Bond mythology, and *cough* those other two flicks, should you bother shelling out a considerable sum for this admittedly impressive looking beast? Happily, I can report that Paul

Duncan has crafted a very welcome addition due to the genuinely unique coverage and rare photography within. Being a confessed Bond nutter, I have read and devoured pretty much every one of these type of releases yet to my surprise it is literally packed with images I have never seen before. Amazing production photos and unused artwork abound as the stars and production team tell the story of each movie from their own unique viewpoints and experiences.

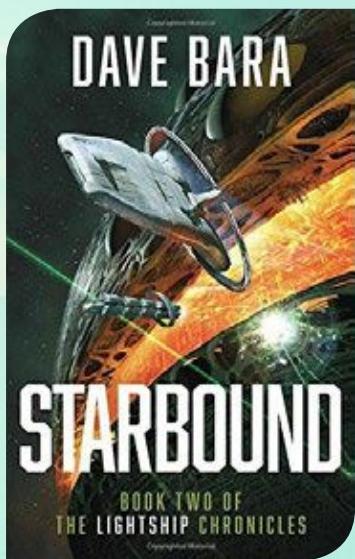
It is a compelling read, I do not use that word very often – yet compelling it is. Whether you just dip in and out, or read it cover to cover, there are a mass of

fascinating facts, and background stories to be discovered within its behemoth 626 pages. There is also a lack of whitewashing over events that is also refreshing when it comes to the antics of George Lazenby and the tragic failing of the amazing Timothy Dalton era to take off at the box office. This is where *The James Bond Archives* earns its keep. Making you feel like the cast and crew have popped round your gaff to tell you how it really was back then. It's an anecdotal treasure trove that gives you an honest and unparalleled look at the entire series of films from start to finish. Paul Duncan has done an incredible job putting it all together, especially with so many of the crew and cast of the early movies no longer with us.

This is also a very impressive book aesthetically speaking, beautifully bound, with lots of airs and graces. Unfortunately, this approach does not come without its problems, unless you have the gamma powered strength of a certain emerald Avenger! It is massive. It also weighs half a stone (seven pounds to you Yankee types). I stupidly tried to read this in bed and was very nearly castrated when I dropped it on myself. It's gorgeous, but really high maintenance. You need to decide to have a serious read, and a large table top is a sensible precaution. Whoever came up with the phrase 'throw the book at them' – clearly had something like this bad boy in mind!

It is worth the money, though, and if you have a reinforced bookcase it will be one of the jewels in your home library.

JORDAN ROYCE



STARBOUND: LIGHTSHIP CHRONICLES, BOOK TWO

AUTHOR: DAVE BARA / PUBLISHER: DEL REY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Tales of exploration among the stars, discovering strange new worlds and old threats are certainly nothing new. They are a cornerstone in the space opera subgenre

after all, and some of the most influential franchises have been built upon that theme. However, overdone as it often is, there are rare books that prove capable of putting a new spin on old ideas, such as this example: *Starbound*.

Set several years after the first book of the Lightship Chronicles ended in fire, *Starbound* follows up on the story of Peter Cochrane. Now serving as a third officer on a new lightship, he has returned to assisting the Federation's efforts to reunite humanity. However, when a relic of a lost age emerges on their ship's sensors, spectres of the past soon come back to haunt him...

The book retains many core strengths, which, ultimately, made the first one great, blending together many traditional sci-fi tropes while putting a new spin on them. In this case, it moves away from Star Trek somewhat and more towards a few ray gun Gothic themes, especially in terms of the main villain and shadow games, with figures scheming behind closed doors. It's very Dan Dare-esque in the best way, tempering in inherent cheesiness of some of those influences while retaining their essential charm. It certainly helps from this angle that there's far more action to be had this time around, and events play out on a much grander scale than before. *Starbound* ultimately presents a deep,

complex and engaging universe, but it never forgets to have some old fashioned fun once in a while.

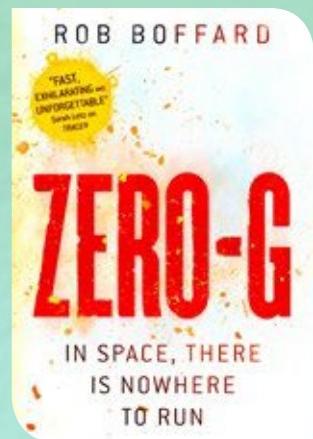
A further development, and a definite improvement over the past book, is the characters themselves. While still carrying out the traditional tropes and roles, Cochrane, Wesley, and the crew have more of a human edge to their actions, and seem less like archetypes than true characters.

Unfortunately, a few flaws do remain here despite all of this. Bara's writing style still seems to skimp on details and descriptions, meaning it's a light read but can seem insubstantial at times. While it tackles big ideas, there are a few times where the worlds truly seem alien, and it can be difficult to get into the sense of mystery. Furthermore, the characters perform some rather head-scratching actions at times, for the sake of the plot rather than real sense. This was true of *Impulse* as well, but it's far more evident here, especially towards the end.

Whatever its problems, *Starbound* nevertheless remains solidly entertaining and an engaging read. Space opera fans should most definitely give this one a look.

CALLUM SHEPARD



**ZERO-G**

AUTHOR: ROB BOFFARD
PUBLISHER: ORBIT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Rob Boffard's second entry in the Outer Earth series is a taunted, menacing cosmic thriller, with more than a hint of Judge Dredd about it. Package-toting tracer turned humanity-defending stomper Riley Hale attempts to immerse herself in the somewhat straightforward life of protecting the humans of Outer Earth, a gargantuan satellite acting as humanity's sole refuge ever since the Earth's destruction. However, her life is thrown in jeopardy when she becomes blackmailed into breaking a lethal prisoner out of jail to avenge a mad doctor's own desires. Riley is left with few options, but must somehow balance her forced breakout mission with saving all life on-board the Outer Earth at all costs.

What sounds like a run-of-the-mill sci-fi adventure delights the reader in being a riveting, claustrophobic tale, full of suspense and intrigue. Boffard pulls out all the tricks of the thriller handbook, and stuffs Zero-G with as much heart-stopping action as possible; all written with a graceful pace that never lets up, but also never loses focus or hook.

Those who haven't read Outer Earth's first instalment, Tracers, will still find much to enjoy here and won't become lost through continuity. Zero-G may spin out of the events of Tracers, but it's still a fairly standalone story, one where the grim heroics result in an intoxicating read. That grimness spreads throughout the novel,

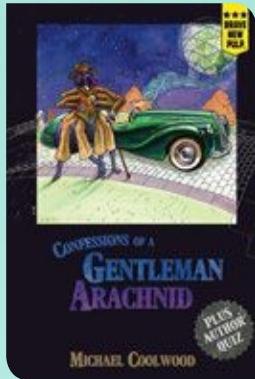
page after page, may just be a tad off-putting to some readers, as Zero-G, for all its riotous exploits, doesn't find a lot of time for humour.

However, that lack of humour doesn't make Zero-G any less of a wonderful novel. It's packed with blood-curling excitement that's wrapped up in a writing style full of charm, as well as a deft handling of keeping the reader's attention. Zero-G is just about everything sci-fi Hollywood blockbusters wish they could be, but ultimately fail to be, making Zero-G as vital as it is entertaining.

FRED McNAMARA



9

**CONFESIONS OF A GENTLEMAN ARACHNID**

AUTHOR: MICHAEL COOLWOOD
PUBLISHER: MONTAG PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Milligan Clodthorpe, gentleman arachnid, accepts an invitation to stay with his

cousin Gertrude at the fabulous estate known as Newbury Towers (but only after she's promised that terrifying Uncle Angus isn't in residence), he really couldn't predict what he'd let himself in for.

Things don't start well - Uncle Angus arrives unexpectedly and tries to hunt Milligan down with a shotgun, and then Milli's body gets hijacked by a feckless scoundrel called Bainbridge, which means Milli wakes up inside a far more primitive human model, while Bainbridge runs riot inside Milligan's skin. The only way Milli can even begin to track Bainbridge down and rescue his stolen form is by joining an elite arachnid Special Forces unit with a zero percent survival rate. And (as if that wasn't bad enough), Bainbridge is about to marry a human, so even if Milligan can recover his body, heaven knows the state it will be in when he

finds it.

Michael Coolwood's bio mentions that he's a fan of P. G. Wodehouse and Douglas Adams, and even if we hadn't read the bio before starting the book, those inspirations wouldn't have been hard to guess. Yet despite the unmistakeable similarities in style, and a few ideas like downloading minds into unsuspecting new bodies at the flick of an emergency brain evacuation switch, that are worthy of the Hitchhiker's Guide, Confessions has a cool wit and a unique voice all of its own. Milligan Clodthorpe is a marvellous character - pompous, self-deluded and a little bit of a posh idiot, but in all other respects a thoroughly spiffing arachnid, and he's accompanied by a fantastically colourful cast of characters, including a manservant called Forsythe who isn't beyond a little bit of

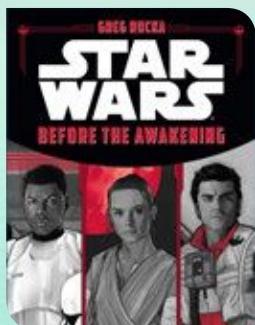
kidnapping and terrorising when the occasion demands it, a family friend who looks like a walking coffin and a mad relative who leads an interstellar battle fleet and, in what must be a nod to The Restaurant at the End of the Universe, Milligan even finds time to take in a very exotic burlesque show involving performers who actually put on more clothes than they started off with.

This is an elegantly written and extremely funny slice of surrealist fantasy from a writer who obviously loves the genre and has the ability to turn even giant spiders into sympathetic comic characters. Arachnophobes and arach-not-phobes rejoice! This is a darn entertaining read, no matter how many legs you've got!

IAN WHITE



10

**STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - BEFORE THE AWAKENING**

AUTHOR: GREG RUCKA
PUBLISHER: DISNEY LUCASFILM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Star Wars: The Force Awakens has pretty much conquered the world at this point. Fans being fans, the search began in earnest to find out more about the central characters from the movie - Finn, Rey, and Poe.

Fortunately for us, this isn't Disney's first time dealing with the eager hordes. Star Wars: The Force Awakens: Before the Awakening is a pre-movie anthology that gives some insight and back story to the heroes of the movie.

Finn's story is up first - Rucka's short introduction to what Finn did before he became Finn sets out what the life of a First Order Stormtrooper is like. This tantalising set-up for Finn

has also led some to read further into scenes from the movie, which is entirely what this book is for. Like all of the stories here, it cleverly integrates with the movie as a whole.

Rey's story is pretty much designed to underline her key qualities; she's brilliant, brave, clever and incredibly lonely. It's the longest story in the book (almost a novella in length), and gives us a really good idea what life on the desert world of Jakku is like. It's also the most somber story and the most engaging throughout. Much like the movie, it's impossible not to really like this version of Rey.

The final tale focuses on Poe Dameron. He's a pilot first

and foremost, and Before the Awakening delivers us a full on tale of fighter pilot fury. Not only do we get a cracking little story about Dameron's youth, we also get to learn just how good he is when piloting any sort of space ship. Fans of the ships of Star Wars may get a thrill out some of the craft Poe gets to use in this story, the rest of us will simply be thrilled by the action.

Overall, a cracking read. A little simplistic, and older readers may find themselves wanting more, but worth your time.

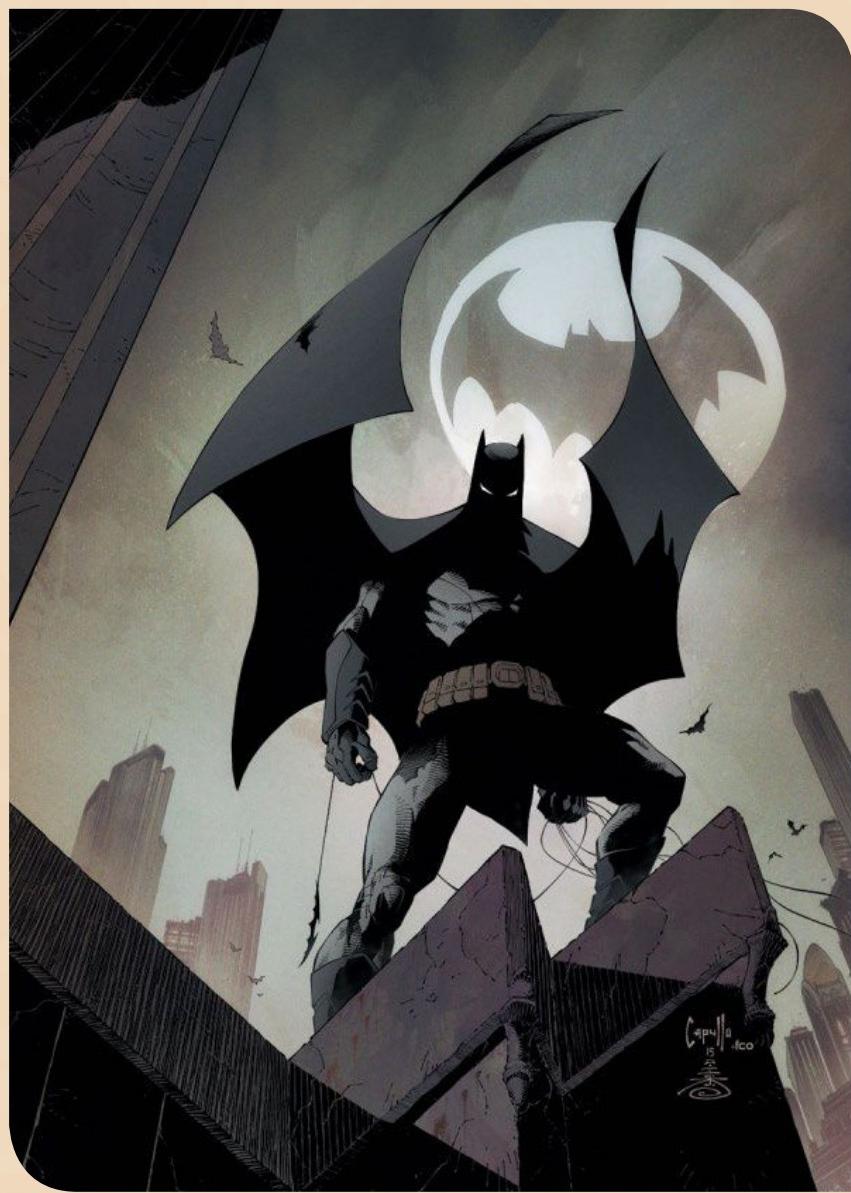
ED FORTUNE



9

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



February time! Another year, another month, another instalment of *View from the Watchtower*, and another heap of comic book news.

We'll jump right on in at the deep end, with the first of the Big Two. There were rumours, following his *Death of the Family* (nobody really died) and *Endgame* (it wasn't), that the Batman and Joker were done, for Scott Snyder, at least. Well, they aren't. Recent events see Snyder and Capullo return to the mutually self-

destructive duo; on a park bench, no less. With Bruce Wayne hitherto suffering from amnesia and living a happy, Bat-free life, recent events have seen his old persona beckon again. Commissioner Gordon's stand-in Batman is struggling in his battle against Bloom (not the Joker in disguise, then, as some have theorised), so it's only a matter of time before Wayne returns to the cowl. Bats on the brain, indeed. Leave it to a similarly retired, possibly amnesiac Joker to find

bearded Bruce (it's a good look) on a park bench and offer a little advice: don't return to old habits.

We all know he will, but it's a nice touch in typical Snyder style. You can find Batman and the Joker's *Forrest Gump* homage in this month's *Batman* #49, and (presumably) see Batman return in *Batman* #50, due March 23rd. Pity poor Alfred, who has been enjoying Master Bruce's more laid back demeanour during the interim period.

This isn't all, though. You can find out more of the world which *Dawn of Justice* inhabits by reading its exclusive prequel comic... through, um, Doctor Pepper. The five-issue comic, if you're US-based, can be accessed by downloading an app and taking photos of your empties. Although the book reveals about as much as any movie prequel comic (precisely nothing of value), you will see Batfleck take down Firefly and watch Superman save actual lives without destroying any cities in the process. Not even a single city block!

The pair's *Dawn of Justice* co-star is getting in on the hype train too. Ahead of her cinematic debut in *Dawn of Justice*, the popular Linda Carter incarnation of the character will be making another appearance in *Wonder Woman '77*, returning this month after a four-month hiatus. But that's not all! The Amazon will also be getting an all-new revitalised origin tale: *The Legend of Wonder Woman*. The nine-issue miniseries started in January and continues as we speak, written and illustrated by Renae De Liz and Ray Dillon.

DC aren't the only ones building on the recent cinematic hype, with *Civil War II* inbound. More details have emerged, sketching out some of the main players. As anticipated, Iron Man is once again at the centre of it all, this time facing off against Carol Danvers' Captain Marvel. Promotional art has begun to surface, depicting a lot of very tense-looking faces and lens flare. *Civil War II* is due in June, written by Brian Michael Bendis. Expect punching. And at least one major death too, apparently.

If *Civil War II* sounds a little Steve Rogers-lite, worry not, as the man is expected to return as Captain America this summer. *Captain America: Steve Rogers* (it's right there in the title!) will have Rogers back as Cap, once again battling Hydra and, crucially, no longer an old man. The return of youthful, not old, Rogers, will be detailed in *Avengers*



FUTURE QUEST

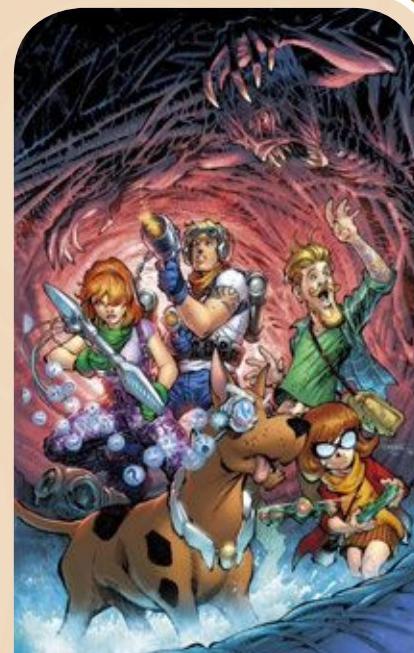
Standoff! during which Steve's youthful vim and vigour are returned to him. Where does that leave current Cap, Sam Wilson? He gets to keep on captaining, with there being no plans to cancel *Captain America: Sam Wilson* even as the original returns.

Marvel Comics in 'dead character returning to life' shocker! Recent marketing has teased at the return of one of its deceased characters, loudly proclaiming 'dead no more' on a pitch black background for all to see. Who exactly? Marvel's highest profile dead man is currently Wolverine, although there's always Professor X, Namor, Gwen Stacy, or Uncle Ben, among others. I know, I find it hard to keep track, too, and it is *literally* my job to keep track of that sort of thing here.

A brief sojourn from the Big Two, but still movie hype related: Kevin Smith's upcoming *Yoga Hosers* has got a comic

book tie-in from the folk at Dynamite Entertainment. The book is written by Smith himself, and serves as a prequel to the movie starring Smith's daughter Harley Quinn (really), Johnny Depp's daughter Lily Rose, and Depp, returning to the role of Guy Lapointe, first seen in *Tusk*. *Yoga Hosers* was given out for free to attendees of the Sundance Film Festival, to mark the film's début there. It's an exclusive thing too, so at least it will be easy to avoid.

It's conventional that we wrap up with weird/silly/cute/awesome news that'll have us going out on a high, usually from Archie, *Army of Darkness* (*Hi! Furious Road*) or some other daft crossover or tie-in of the month (*Hi! Scratch n' sniff Fight Club*). No change there, but, this time, it comes from one of The Big Two. No, I can't quite believe it myself, but DC Comics has announced a line of their

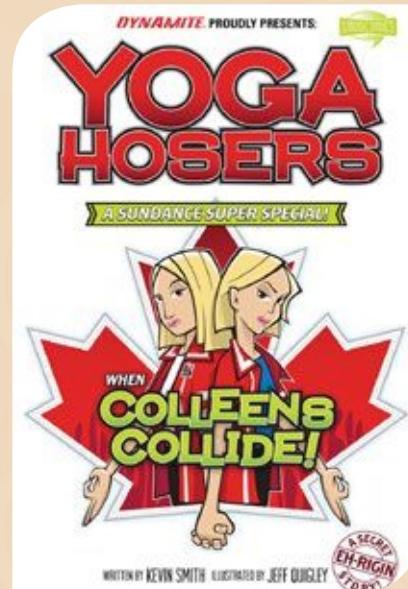


Hanna-Barbera acquisitions, reimagined, DC-style. That gets us *Future Quest* – composed of Hanna-Barbera's action heroes, such as Jonny Quest, Birdman, the Galaxy Trio and Frankenstein Jr, among others – and *Wacky Raceland*, which looks to be a cross between *Wacky Races* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (it shares a designer, too, in Marl Sexton).

Also in for a DC overhaul is *Scooby Doo*, reinvented by Jim Lee in *Scooby Apocalypse*. While sexy Fred and Daphne are to be expected (those tattooed biceps, though! Fred's been working out), it also gets us a minuscule Carrie Kelly-esque Velma, a goggled-contraption-wearing Scooby and... whatever Shaggy is supposed to be. As one might expect, it looks very... Jim Lee.

The *Flintstones* are relatively unchanged in terms of their design, although you will note that the families do appear to have gotten a lot sexier since we saw them last. The comics are skewing towards older audiences than before (teenagers everywhere presumably rejoicing at *Scooby Doo* and *Flintstones* comics that they can at last fap to), brought to us by such talent as Jim Lee, Ken Pontac, Leonardo Manco (um, *Hellblazer*), Amanda Conner (*Harley Quinn*... the other one, not Kevin Smith's daughter) and Jeff Parker. *Future Quest*, *Scooby Wacky Raceland*, *Scooby Apocalypse*, and *The Flintstones* will be available from all good booksellers this May. Jinkies!

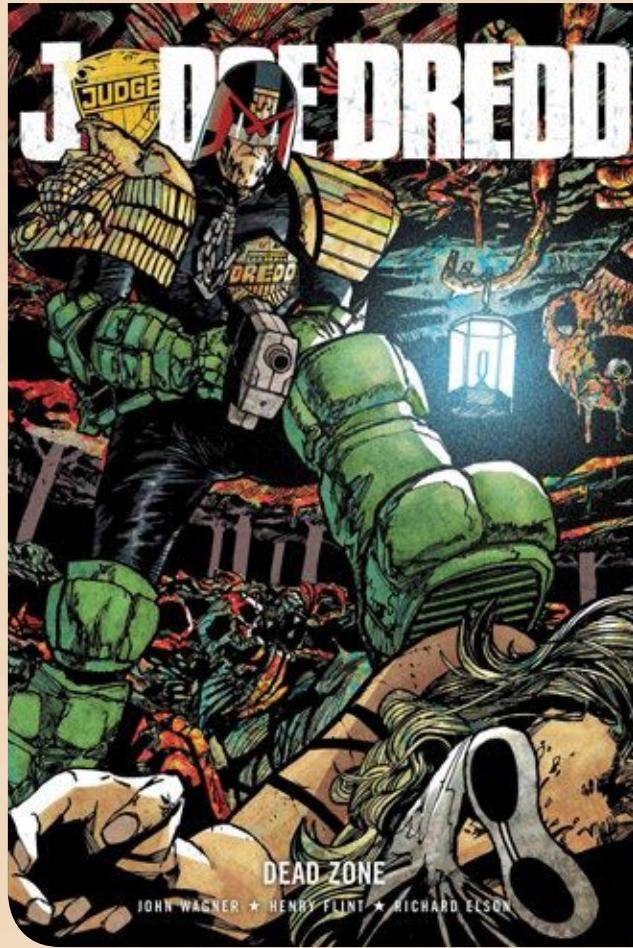
And that's all, folks! All wrapped up for another month, you pesky kids can find me via e-mail or Twitter, where I'll be replying to mail and doing work, and totally not leering at sexy drawings of various *Flintstones*. Yabba Dabba Doo indeed. +



Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley

REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



JUDGE DREDD: DEAD ZONE

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTIST: HENRY FLINT, RICHARD ELSON / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD GRAPHIC NOVELS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

One of the great things about the Judge Dredd comics is how the dystopian setting has evolved over its almost forty-year run. The 2011–2012 epic Day of Chaos saw a brutal virus kill off ninety percent of Mega-City One's population, and the consequences are still seen in the strip today. 2014 Judge Dredd Megazine story Dead Zone, now reprinted in graphic novel form, uses the Chaos Day fallout to nastily good effect.

John Wagner's story opens with Yodie and Belle Planchet, two poor wastelanders hoping to be allowed a new life in the city now there's suddenly a lot of free living space. Unfortunately, they're nabbed by a criminal gang, who force Yodie to work in the body mine – where millions of dumped, rotting Chaos Day corpses are looted for valuable possessions. Meanwhile (bear with us, it gets complicated), Judge Dredd is investigating a suspicious death at the nearby memorial centre. Oh, and then Yodie finds a bracelet that gives him the power to turn invisible, teleport, or shoot giant lasers from his hands. This has been one hell of a plot synopsis, and we've not even got to the robot bishop yet.



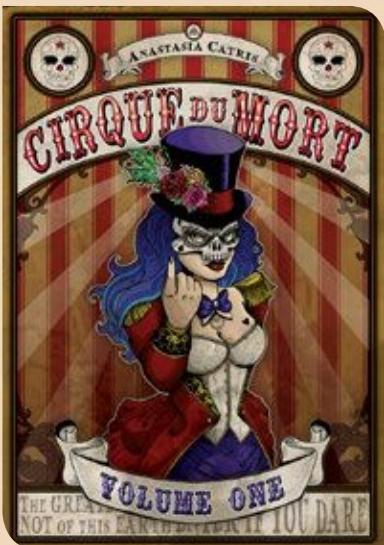
Yes, it sounds all over the place, and indeed it is, as what begins as a murder mystery becomes a fugitive thriller, leading to a daft sci-fi action climax. The gritty opening is its strongest section, where the scenes in the body mine really are gruesome – Henry Flint draws decaying corpses like no other, with careful use of blood reds and sickly greens against the dark background really amping up the horror. The story falters when the characters behind the mysterious bracelet enter the fray – their identity is too big a twist to reveal, but suffice to say they seem to have jumped from a different comic, and indeed another sci-fi subgenre entirely, which can seem jarring.

Nevertheless, all the ludicrous tangents of Dead Zone are unified by Yodie and Belle's struggle to survive, with the stakes always about whether they'll be able to find the new life they need. It's an ultimately optimistic tale of finding hope among the ruins, and is engaging enough to cover up any cracks in the plot.

This volume also includes 'Breaking Bud', a shorter story carrying on the tale of the incredible bracelet. This follows Bud, a laid-off Justice Department employee who vengefully steals the bracelet in order to rebuild his shattered life. After the optimistic tone of Yodie's story, this is back to typical 2000 AD cynicism. Though it has neither the emotional nor the brutal impact of Dead Zone, it's an enjoyable enough thriller, which makes good use of the bracelet's abilities and gives Dredd a unique case to solve.

KIERON MOORE





CIRQUE DU MORT: VOLUME ONE

AUTHOR & ARTIST & PUBLISHER: ANASTASIA CATRIS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Cirque Du Mort: Volume One is a Grand Guignol series of dark fairy tales, with every three or four page vignette focused upon the grisly deeds and fates of each of the colourful Big Top performers. After a neat poetic prologue, we meet Mimi the Mime, and without giving the details of her story away, you've only got to look closely

at the picture of Mimi that introduces the chapter, to get a fair sense of how her story turns out. After she comes Antoinette the magician, posed seductively beside the blood encrusted blade of her guillotine, and the characters that follow include an immortal bearded lady, a fire dancer who - we soon discover - is quite appropriately nicknamed after the Hindu Goddess of Death, and a shattered acrobat whose heart is stitched together by an enchanted costume master (which was easily our favourite story). It's a mixed bag of grisliness, with the only real illustrations being the portraits of the performers (and one or two incidental press cuttings and posters) and although the stories are well written, very few of them hold any surprises for readers who already know their horror genre.

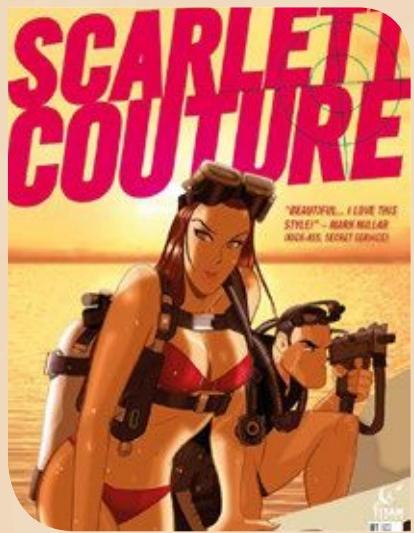
It's a shame, because the central 'circus of the damned' motif that binds Cirque Du Mort together is an interesting one and, if she had given herself a little bit more space to tell each tale and worked harder at avoiding the clichés, writer and artist Anastasia Catris could have produced something cool and surprising, but the inevitable Tales of the Crypt story structure works against itself and, like most anthologies, one or two of the tales are very good but the majority are simply filler. Having said that, Catris does have an interesting voice and she keeps everything fresh by constantly switching around her storytelling style – the poem about the conjoined twins is excellent, even if the

denouement is predictable.

Catris' artwork, though, is fantastic and beautifully designed. The mystical atmosphere Catris' graphics evoke complements her stories perfectly. In fact, if there had been more art and less words (most of the stories would have been so much more effective told in pictures) this could have been a very good book indeed.

Cirque Du Mort is a great idea that's flawed in the execution but despite those reservations, it will be interesting to see what Catris does with Volume Two. Personally, we think that if she concentrates less on the performers as individuals, and more on telling an ensemble tale about the eponymous death's circus, we think she'll be on to something pretty special.

IAN WHITE



SCARLETT COUTURE COLLECTION

WRITER & ARTIST: DES TAYLOR / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Scarlett Couture series by Des Taylor has been getting quite a bit of attention in the comic world. When the first issue hit the shelves last year, it was well received and soon got a relatively large fan base. By being published by Titan Comics, the series has been allowed the exposure

it deserves, which is something the company are known for.

This paperback collection contains the first four issues in the Scarlett Couture series. These are each part of the storyline known as 'Project Stardust'. The concept of the series is relatively straightforward. Scarlett Couture is head of security at the supermodel agency known as Chase Couture. However, this is all a cover story, and she is in fact an international spy. When one of Scarlett's colleagues is abducted, the team at Chase Couture jump into action.

The premise of the story has been done before. However, it is rare that we see a female character take on the titular role as a spy in a comic series. Des Taylor handles this very well, and although there is some stereotypical sexualisation of Scarlett, it is not as over the top as so many writers and artists are keen to do.

Although there is nothing overly shocking in the story, these first few issues centre on the development of the characters and allows for several yet unanswered questions, which leave the reader wanting more of this series. We will definitely be following this series as it develops into a wider story arc.

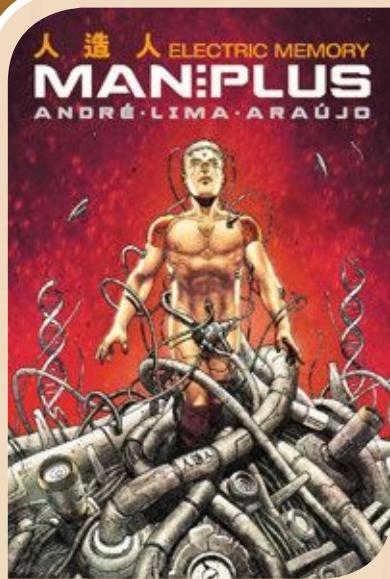
Whilst fans of the series will have the original issues, this collected paperback has some extras that could convince a number of fans to invest in this collection. Titan Comics have included character profiles and a mock-

up interview with Scarlett Couture. Also included is original concept art as well as potential covers for future novels.

These first issues were fairly strong in creating a character and introducing the readers to the story. The art is very well handled, with a classic cartoon feel. As the next issues in the series are released and the story arc widens, it is likely that the series will improve with scope. However, Des Taylor has possibly created a successful comic series that could survive into the future, as well as creating one of the strongest female character launches in comics.

ANDREW MUSK



**MAN: PLUS #1**

AUTHOR & ARTIST: ANDRÉ LIMA ARAÚJO /
PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's 2042, and multinational corporations govern the world. Olissipo City, built in Portugal by a conglomerate of biotech companies, has become one of the world's most prominent metropolises. But all's not well here – anti-robot crime is on the rise.

Man: Plus, originally published online and now released in print by Titan, is

a dystopian thriller from creator André Lima Araújo. This first issue sees an unknown android get attacked by a gang of cyborg criminals, only to brutally kill one and escape. A crack police team – the Special Operations Force – is tasked to investigate the mess left behind.

In this squad, we meet futuristic versions of a lot of police procedural tropes – the rugged hero, the hardline veteran boss, the newbie – which helps us immediately get to know them, though this issue doesn't dig much deeper than that. Nevertheless, it's only a first issue, and there's a lot of potential for the detectives of the SOF to become much more interesting characters.

The time spent with the criminal gang, recovering from their botched operation is more intriguing – Araújo sets up this odd bunch in a way that gets us wondering just what their motives are, and sympathising with their poor bullied techie.

But the real strength is the way these two parallel stories show off different environments; the sleek, futuristic tech of the police station contrasts sharply with the murky slums of the city's residential areas. Araújo has put a lot of work into the design of Olissipo City, and into the look of Man: Plus as a whole – there are hints of Blade Runner and Metropolis in the dystopian cityscape, and of Akira in the cyberpunk violence, with the European setting lending a slice of originality. The precise line art allows the details, carefully layered into every scene to draw you in,

and Arisia Rozegar's colours build up a mood that's grungy rather than flashy, all building this place up as a perfect setting to explore the very relevant themes of prejudice, hate crime and corporate power.

And that complex world building is the strength of Man: Plus – it's at once familiar and original, fantastic and real, and easy to become absorbed in. Though it touches on intriguing themes, the story feels like it's not yet hit its stride – nevertheless, Olissipo City will be well worth a return visit.

KIERON MOORE

**SKAL (ISSUES 1 AND 2)**

WRITER & ARTIST: JENNIE GYLLEBLAD /
PUBLISHER: PATREON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Skal is a mature web comic fantasy set in an Arabian-inspired desert series. The story revolves around Mushirah, a mysterious woman who is first introduced trapped in a cell with her lips stitched together – rough deal. After receiving help to escape, she is soon left alone to seek sanctuary in a city fraught with

crime and deceit, and her enemies are not far behind. It is evident Mushirah is a powerful woman but her intentions remain a mystery thus far.

The comic's sole creator, Jennie Gyllblad, uses watercolour, ink and pencil to illustrate the lavish and colourful world she has formed. Although rough around the edges, Gyllblad certainly has a talent with colours that add texture and give life to her characters. Her passion for the opulent tints and luscious costumes is evident with the detail and boldness of her work. The layout of her pages are filled with character from the backdrops to the actions of the people she illustrates making her work rather unique.

Despite its semi-dark and mature content there are comic relief characters such as the young Voresh, a streetwise pickpocket scraping her way out of mountainous debt. She knows her way around the town and the people in it but has a cocky sense of confidence that gets her into trouble. There is also muscle man Omran, a reluctant 'weapon for hire' who is forced to protect Mushirah, although he does not trust her. Gyllblad has built very alluring characters that seem to be the focal point of her story. As she slowly introduces Mushirah to the audience, she throws in some very well developed personalities that bring the story to life and hopefully there will be more to come that, and that will help flesh out the story.

As a free-to-read web comic, Skal is funded by Patreon: a funding site that allows patrons to support their favourite creators and artists through the making of their own creations. You can receive extra stuff such as art and, in Jennie Gyllblad's case, nude sketches as rewards. So if that's something you are interested in, then sign up! As a mystery escapade, Skal does not fall short. It's an intriguing adventure, as Gyllblad slowly reveals Mushirah's purpose within the plot. For all we know so far, she could be something evil.

SAMANTHA WARD



REALLY FUNNY, SHARP, SMART
AND LOOKS GREAT!
ROB WILLIAMS
(**2000AD**, **MARTIAN MANHUNTER**)

AN EARLY FRONT RUNNER FOR MY
BREAK-OUT INDIE OF THE YEAR
COMIC BASTARDS

UTTERLY FLAWLESS STUFF...THE
VERY DEFINITION OF A 'CAN'T
MISS' TITLE
BIG COMIC PAGE

A TRUE CLASSIC IN THE MAKING
BOOKMUNCH

A TENSE, INTRIGUING PLOT THAT
PROMISES FIREWORKS...THIS IS A
COMIC THAT CLEARLY HAS
SOMETHING TO SAY
BLEEDING COOL

JAW-DROPPINGLY BEAUTIFUL... IF
IT'S NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT
SERIES OF RECENT TIMES, IT'S
CERTAINLY THE MOST AMBITIOUS
STARBURST MAGAZINE

A PRIMAL SCREAM BURSTING TO
GET THROUGH THE PAGES
GEEK SYNDICATE

I THINK THIS COMIC IS PLANNING
TO KILL ME
MINDLESS ONES

A STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL
WORK...COULD WELL BE THE
UK COMIC OF THE YEAR
COMICS ALLIANCE

REALLY STRONG CHRIS MORRIS-Y
BLACK COMEDY. GET!
KIERON GILLEN
(**THE WICKED + THE DIVINE**)

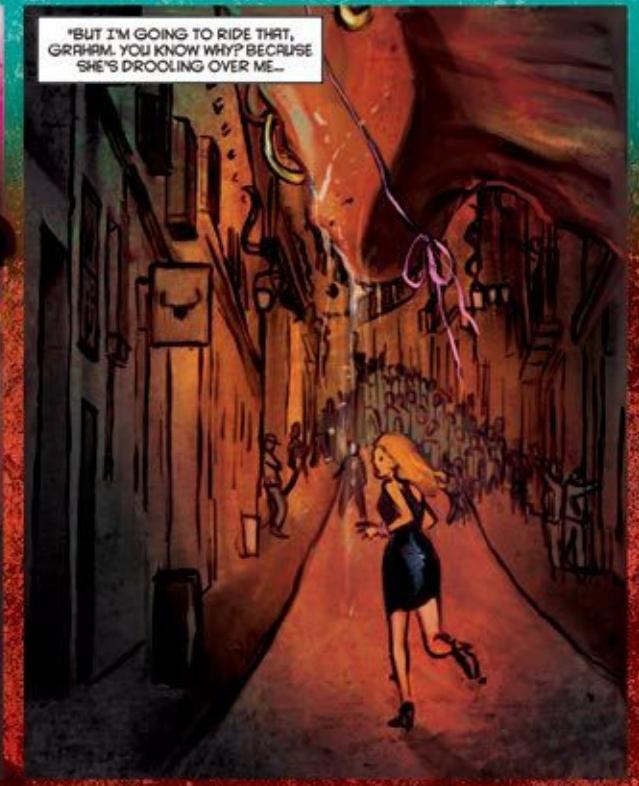
BEAST WAGON

OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON // JOHN PEARSON // COLIN BELL

C H A P T E R T H R E E

ON SALE MARCH // CHAPTER ONE & TWO AVAILABLE NOW





M I N O R

A B E A S T
LETTERER: COLIN BELL

WRITER: OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATOR: MARTIN SIMMONDS

STARBURST



TAURUS

WAGON TAIL
BEAST WAGON CREATED BY JOHN PEARSON & OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON

ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY
ROUND UP FROM
THE WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA FROM
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



New Movie Celebrates 45 Years of Kamen Rider

To celebrate the 45th anniversary of Shotaro Ishinomori's masked marvel Kamen Rider, Toei Animation has announced a new movie, **Kamen Rider #1**. Besides a confirmed 2016 release, details are scarce concerning just how the hero will commemorate the landmark, except for the title's hint towards a return to his roots.

Funimation Reboot to Launch in the UK

Funimation's new-look streaming service, Funimation Now, will be taking off in February, and all of us anime fans in the UK will be able to access it instantly. As part of the overhaul, a redesigned website and updated console and Roku apps will be released in May, and new apps will also be available for Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Windows 10 Universal.

Sanji Returns to ONE PIECE Manga for Origin Revelations

At the end of 2015's Jump Festa event, **One Piece** creator Eiichiro Oda first hinted that the curly-eyed pirate-chef extraordinaire would be filling his much mourned gap in the manga in 2016. Sure enough, he's made his return, and the first exposé of the character's past has taken shape in the reveal of his full name. More will be unveiled about Sanji, third son of the Vinsmoke family, as the manga continues.

Kohske Prepares for GANGSTA's Triumphant Return

Fans of Kohske's **Gangsta** have been missing it since the manga went on hiatus from November last year. The author's ongoing health problems meant she was briefly hospitalised, and had to put the series on hold while she recovered. But Kohske took to Twitter recently thanking her readers for their support, and adding that she's working towards getting **Gangsta** back up and running.

Akiyuki Shinbo Directs Studio Shaft Adaptation of MARCH COMES IN LIKE A LION

Chika Umino's Kodansha Manga Award-winning series **March Comes in Like a Lion** is being made into a Shaft anime. The story follows the tranquil life of a shōgi player, Rei, as he comes to know the neighbouring family, Madoka Magica's Akiyuki Shinbo will direct this adaptation of the manga created by the author of the beloved comedy drama series **Honey and Clover**.

Ghibli's WHEN MARNIE WAS THERE Nominated for Academy Award

Studio Ghibli's last feature to date, and the first made without the guidance of co-founders Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, has been nominated in the Animated Feature Film category at the Oscars. It's competing with **Anomalisa**, **Boy and the World**, **Shaun the Sheep Movie** and **Inside Out** for the Academy Award, and the winner will be announced at 88th Oscars ceremony on February 28th.

Tomohiko Ito Links MCU with New SWORD ART ONLINE Movie

The director and character designer team of Tomohiko Ito and Shingo Adachi will be working together once again on a new **Sword Art Online** anime movie, following a story by the light novel series' author Reki Kawahara. Ito has made a cross-cultural hint towards the plot of the film, saying that it resonates with **Avengers: Age of Ultron**, and the latest news on its progress was that storyboarding was close to completion.

SPLATOON Gets Two Manga Adaptations

With all the manga artist tributes to the paintballing shooter we've been seeing lately, it's little wonder that it's getting two of its own manga adaptations. The first, **Honobono Ika 4-Koma** is a four-panel comic by Kino Takahashi, and the second, **Splatoon Play Manga** will feature various artists bringing their own gameplay experiences into the frames. Both are confirmed for this year, but release dates are yet to be announced.



A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

COSPLAY CATWALK



Dale Smith against 15th Cyber Legion, Loughborough 2015

This month, we profile Dokka Chapman, a cosplay photographer involved with a group who dress as our favourite Time Lord.

STARBURST: How did you get started in the cosplay world?

Dokka Chapman: Like most things in my life, it was through my photography. It's always been a great way to meet new people and have great experiences. I'd attempted anime in the past, but it's always been the sci-fi element that has interested me more. I remember my first con from when I was living in Plymouth. It was a small outdoor event with only one guest (the lovely Jeremy Bulloch). I had been taking photos for the local *Doctor Who* guild, Plymouth Who, and the organisers of the event had asked me to come along and get some shots for them.

The mass of people dressed up astonished me, and some of the levels of creativity made sure I captured some amazing moments. By the end of the day, I was hooked. I had always dressed a little different and had just purchased a long red coat so went about being my own Doctor... although now I am known more as The Valeyard.

How did the *Doctor Who* cosplay group come about?

Burning Skies Cosplay was started a couple of years ago on Facebook by Andrew Creak, an amazing chap from Cardiff (whom I've only met the once, but will never forget). From there, it grew from a couple of fans and cosplayers in the UK to now a 1,000+ member guild with people from all over the world. It's not all about dressing up, we have professional impersonators, fan film directors, vloggers, digital artists, illustrators and even people who are involved in *Doctor Who* itself. For the last 2 years, we have also been making a charity calendar where all the money raised goes to Alzheimer's Society. I went to the *Doctor Who* Experience in Cardiff recently and they have one hanging in their staff room.

I feel truly blessed to have met them. Bad experiences with cosplay groups in the past meant I had almost given up on the scene; then it was through

an old friend that I was told about the group. Since then, I have attended charity events, conventions and meets across the UK, along with my camera! If it wasn't for the group, I wouldn't have gotten to work with Luke Newman and the *Doctor Who* 2012 fan film team, as well as meet my amazing and supportive partner Sarah (known as 'Short and Scarfy').

The group itself is more than a mass of people with one thing in common, it's a family who look out for one another and are the best bunch of cosplayers I've had the privilege to meet.

What sort of things do you get up to apart from conventions?

I don't dress up all that often. Being the Burning Skies photographer means a lot of the time you need to stand out so mostly I'm in the red coat. I do a fair amount of other photography outside of that, including steampunk, band promos, and other creative ideas that pop into my head. I love to attend gigs and cabarets.



Shawn Levy & Jadeifer Knight, Cardiff 2015



Elle Law (AKA Missy Master)



Ali Fry against 'The Wire', Loughborough 2015

Working alongside burlesque artists is great fun as they are bouncing with energy and you never know what's going to happen next when they are on stage.

For the last 5 years, I've been working with a number of alternative magazines and blogs as a music journalist. Basically, I've used it as an excuse to meet some of my favourite musicians including artists like Filter, Ultraviolence, and Angelspit. I don't get paid, but then again life isn't always about the money.

On top of that, I have recently started getting back into modelling. There was a time as a teen where it seemed like a viable option, but then being behind the camera took over. I am also an avid music collector. With over 2,000 units to my collection, I have been using it

all to DJ in Devon and Birmingham for nearly 10 years, as well as introduce friends and others to some amazing acts they would have otherwise missed.

People like to think I'm very busy... I don't know what gave them that impression.

Why do you think cosplaying has taken off in the UK?

Are you kidding?! With both Japan and the USA going cosplay mad, it was only a matter of time before us Brits got involved. It's strange that, although it's now a worldwide phenomenon, it can be a personal thing to each country. The culture that TV and movies have given us in the last century have brought some amazing ideas, and paying homage to them this way is by far one of the greatest forms of

flattery. In the UK, you can find cosplays you wouldn't see stateside, and vice versa. It's what keeps it fresh and ever evolving.

In Britain, we have a rich past in science fiction and adventure, and we hold the nostalgia very close to us. A perfect example is *Doctor Who*. It's the longest running sci-fi series, is part of the BBC's proud history and some of the costumes are incredible. I've met members of the group who are now the same age as some of the men who played the Doctor and they are ecstatic that they can dress as him and look the part. There are two men in particular I can think of. One is known as 'Tall and cloaky' and he is the spitting image of Jon Pertwee (the Third Doctor). He's met with actors who worked on the show in the '70s and are blown away by the similarity and has



Loughborough 2015



Simon Baker, B'ham 2015

even sat in the Whomobile!!!!

As cosplay goes on, I feel it can only get stronger with time. The teens of today who are dressing up will get older and find more new (or possibly old) shows to get invested in, and with that the scene will become commonplace, with conventions becoming more like yearly celebrations to the fandoms the people admire so much.

You can find the Burning Skies Cosplay group at facebook.com/burning.skies.uk, twitter.com/bskiescosplay, and instagram.com/bskiescosplay.

Dokka Chapman's personal photography can be found at facebook.com/crestfall.photography.



Dale Smith & Sarah Poyser B'ham 2015

READER'S COSPLAY

"JINXY GEE COSPLAY"



Our readers profile this month is a new face on the scene, but her enthusiasm is infectious.

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Jinxy Gee Cosplay: I've been cosplaying since July 2015, and it's all because of my sister! I had never really heard about cosplay until she told me about her trip to MCM London. It looked like so much fun, and I've been hooked ever since. I'm just enjoying this new community and friendships that I have made, just from cosplaying for such a small length of time. I can't wait to see what cosplays I'll be trying in the future.

What is your favourite character to dress as?

Hands down, my favourite character to cosplay is Jinx. She was the first ever cosplay that I wore, and she is so much

fun. I have spent hours just practising her facial expressions as I've made it my mission to try and cosplay her as accurately as I possibly can. Plus what's not to love about a crazy girl with too many guns? It gives an excellent excuse to run around cons and just be crazy without a care in the world, I love it!

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

I must admit, I've only now started making my own cosplays, and it's taken me two weeks just to get a basic template right. I'm attempting to make some foam armour, and I'm hoping it'll be ready by May. Usually, I get pieces commissioned and build upon them, for example, my Fishbones: I bought him, but spent what seems like a forever hunting down lights to fit inside, and coming up with a crazy idea of trying to make a budget portable smoke machine to fit inside him. I came up with the idea in the middle of the night to try and use a vape pen, and that took two to three weeks (on and off) to finally manage for that one piece to work how I wanted it to, so I'm rather proud of that.

Find out more about Jinxy Gee Cosplay at facebook.com/JinxyGeeCosplay



Credit Katy Jon Went

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at cosplay@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourites every month

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



TMNT: MUTANTS IN MANHATTAN Officially Announced

There is exciting news for people who have been waiting for a good **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** game, as the much-rumoured **Mutants in Manhattan** has finally been given a tentative release date.

The game, which is being developed by the good people behind the spectacular **Bayonetta** series, is set to hit stores at some point during the summer of 2016, and it is already looking like it will be something very special.

Anybody who has played **Bayonetta** will already know just how good the fighting system in that game is and it looks like a lot of the fast-paced, combo-heavy action is being transferred to this latest **TMNT** project. Could this be the best Turtles game to be produced since the heady golden era of the arcade? Only time will tell, but it's looking extremely promising so far.

COMING SOON



QUANTUM BREAK

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 5TH

Remedy Entertainment, who are best known for creating Max Payne, are back with a game featuring a guy who has the power to manipulate time, freezing the world around him as he goes about doing what he needs to do. Kinda already feels a bit like Max Payne with the 'bullet time' feature, but we'll let it slide because in addition to dodging them, protagonist Jack Joyce (voiced by Shawn Ashmore) will have a number of abilities that will see him smashing bullets out of the air or spawning next to an enemy. Also featuring the talents of genre favourites Dominic Monaghan, Aiden Gillen and Lance Reddick, it certainly sounds interesting.

COMING SOON



STAR FOX ZERO

PLATFORM: WII U
RELEASE DATE: APRIL 21ST

Having been delayed from its intended November release, it's looking increasingly likely that Star Fox Zero may well be one of the Wii U's last titles that is worth getting even a little bit excited about. Nobody at Nintendo seems to know what this is going to be, as they have said that it is not a remake, sequel, or prequel to the original game. Does that mean reboot? Who knows? Still, the motion controls and gamepad should offer some interesting gameplay choices so let's hope it lives up to expectations.

Bungie President Steps Down

After 16 years at the helm, Bungie President Harold Ryan has made the decision to step down and move onto other projects. He will be replaced by current company COO Pete Parsons, who will also take on CEO duties, at least in the short term.

Ryan helmed the company throughout its boom period, overseeing the creation and development of the **Halo trilogy** alongside current-gen smash hit **Destiny**. He leaves a superb legacy that will be very difficult for the company to follow up now that he has gone.

Pete Parsons released a statement along with the announcement, writing: "I want to personally thank Harold for his friendship, passion, hard work, and dedication in helping make Bungie the great company it is today. As a team, we celebrated many victories and weathered many storms."

Good luck to Mr Ryan in whatever he does next and we hope to enjoy more of his creative vision in the gaming world at some point in the future.

MIGHTY NO. 9 Hits Yet Another Snag

The much-anticipated spiritual successor to the **Mega Man** games, **Mighty No. 9**, has been delayed yet again, which is sure to cause plenty of consternation amongst fans who have been waiting for the game to be released in the months following its successful Kickstarter campaign.

Keiji Inafune made the announcement that the game wouldn't be ready for its February 9th release date earlier in the month, adding that problems with the networking code required for the matchmaking feature meant that the team were having to put more work into the game than they expected.

He didn't provide another release date for people to look forward to, instead simply stating that he wants to make sure that the game is good and ready before it is unveiled to its patient audience. At the moment, it's looking like spring 2016 is the most likely time for us to finally get some **Mighty No. 9** in our lives.

COMING SOON



STRANGER OF SWORD CITY

PLATFORM: VITA

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 25TH

The Vita may no longer get to play host to anymore AAA games from Sony, but it is becoming the console of choice for companies that want to release Japanese curios for a Western audience. This dungeon crawler allows you to select from a variety of different classes of character and tasks you with navigating your way through a number of dungeons that contain enemies and traps. It's pretty formulaic by that account, but it received a positive review from Famitsu when it was released in Japan, so it may be worth a crack.

COMING SOON



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

PLATFORM: PC, LINUX, MAC

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 28TH

It's been a little over three years since SEGA signed a deal with Games Workshop to start bringing Warhammer games to players and it looks like we are finally going to be able to get a taste of what they have to offer very soon. The company has brought Total War series developers Creative Assembly on board to make a strategic game based on the Warhammer mythology using the signature style that has made many of the other Total War games hits. It's set to be the 10th title in the Total War series and the first of a trilogy of games based around Warhammer.

David Gaider Leaves BioWare

It's not only Bungie who are feeling the sting of a long-time member leaving the team, as BioWare has also announced that one of their most prominent names is going to be departing the company after 17 years of working for them.

David Gaider, who has been involved in everything from **Neverwinter Nights** through to the **Dragon Age** series, made the decision to quit the company to pursue other challenges. He confirmed that it was his decision to leave and has stated that an announcement relating to his next project will come in due time, so one has to think he has something in the pipeline.

It will be interesting to see what direction BioWare's games take now that they are without one of their most prominent writers and designers. With any luck, a few fresh faces will step up and help the company tell even more great stories.

The FNaF WORLD Saga

Five Nights at Freddy's has become something of a phenomenon in recent years, with developer Scott Cawthon managing to release a number of games in the series over the course of the past two years, ever since the original saw success beyond what anybody would have thought possible. Its brand of jump scares are good for a fright every now and again, but it looks like Cawthon has come undone with his latest project. **FNaF World**, which is an RPG based on the original concept, was released in mid-January, about a month before its set release date and was soon being lambasted for the many bugs and lack of features that people had expected from the game.

Cawthon has a history of releasing his titles before their actual street dates, but he bit off more than he could chew here. After apologising to the Steam users who had downloaded the game and promising that updates would be forthcoming, he appears to have made the decision to remove the game from the Steam store entirely.

Thankfully, he has done this with plenty of class, asking Valve to refund anybody who makes the request, regardless of how long they have owned the game. He has also pledged to get it finished and released in the near future, stating that it will always be free once it hits the store again. We guess it just goes to show that working on so many games in such a short period can come back to haunt you in the long term, so hopefully Scott will slow down a little bit from now on.

MINECRAFT: EDUCATION EDITION Coming

In a move that could cause a lot of consternation in the classroom, Microsoft has announced that they will be releasing a special, educational edition of the **Minecraft** series that can be used by teachers in the classroom to help them show students... something or other.

The game will have a number of additional features, such as a new map and the ability to lock various areas to ensure students focus on one aspect of the game. Microsoft has been quick to point out that they don't want to get rid of the gaming element at all, so the title will actually be little different from the **Minecraft** we already have.

How this is going to help in the classroom is anyone's guess, but it will, at least, help to keep the kids engaged, plus teachers are apparently going to be given the ability to upload lessons that they have created using the tool so that others can take advantage of them. It's set for a summer release, so it will be very interesting to see if any schools actually make the decision to make use of it.



HITMAN to be Episodic

Square Enix really seem to be embracing the episodic model of gaming in recent months. Having first announced that the upcoming **Final Fantasy VII** remake will be made available in episodes, the company has now also decided that their upcoming **Hitman** game is going to get the same treatment.

The decision led to pre-orders for the game, which is set for release in March, being cancelled, causing as much confusion as one would expect.

Hannes Seifert, Head of Studio at developers IO Interactive, commented: "We decided to take the full leap and publish **Hitman** as a truly episodic game experience. Part of that decision is for that little bit of extra time to ensure every location we release is at the quality level fitting for a **Hitman** game. But the main driving reason is that this will allow us to create a living game that will expand and evolve over time and establish a foundation for the future - this is the first game in a storyline, which will continue and expand with future **Hitman** games."

It all sounds interesting, but this is surely the sort of thing that you decide long before a game's release date, rather than in the two months leading into it.

Free-To-Play Iron Maiden Game Coming

Roadhouse Interactive and 50cc Games have announced that they are working on an **Iron Maiden** game that will be released on iOS and Android platforms at some point during the summer.

The game will focus on band mascot Eddie as he evolves into various forms, learns new abilities and travels through time on his quest for something or other. It also promises to feature plenty of tracks from the band's extensive back catalogue, in addition to tons of artwork that fans will be sure to enjoy.

It's going to be free-to-play, which means there are sure to be plenty of ways that the game will try to suck tons of money out of your wallet. Still, if you're a fan of the band, it may be worth checking out.

COMING SOON



ODIN SPHERE LEIFTHRASIR

PLATFORM: PS4, PS3, VITA

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 12TH

*Fans of the original **Odin Sphere** will be looking forward to the awkwardly titled **Leifthrasir**, which is essentially a remake of the classic game. The interlocking story that involves five different protagonists is still going to be as engaging as it always was, plus the visuals look to have been given a touch-up since we saw the original back on the PS2. If nothing else, it will provide 2D JRPG fans with a chance to get their hands on a title that is rather hard to come by these days on its original console.*

COMING SOON



RATCHET AND CLANK

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: APRIL 22ND

*The **Ratchet and Clank** series has always been good for a laugh, though it perhaps doesn't get the recognition that it deserves from some gamers. Still, the original was a superb platformer, so it is great that it is getting reimaged for a new generation of gamers. How closely it will tie into that game is up for debate though, as the title is going to look at the origins of Ratchet and looks to be something of a companion piece for the upcoming movie. Hopefully it won't just end up being a shameless cash-in.*

PSYCHONAUTS 2 Hits

Funding Goal

Crowdfunding sites have offered games the chance to directly influence the gaming market, allowing them to ensure that titles they love get a new lease of life, assuming they can pony up the dough in advance. It has already worked for the likes of **Shenmue III** and **Mighty No. 9** and it now looks like Tim Schafer is going to be able to bring the sequel to the much-loved **Psychonauts** to gamers after hitting his own funding target.

Using the crowdfunding platform Fig, the game has managed to hit the \$3.3 million mark, meaning we should be getting the game at some point in the near future.

This is also something of a success story for Fig, which was only launched in August 2015 as an alternative to Kickstarter that focuses solely on video games. The platform was created by former Double Fine COO Justin Bailey, so it is perhaps unsurprising that its first success story is a Double Fine game. It will be interesting to see if more developers start gravitating to the platform following this success.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



XCOM 2

DEVELOPER: FIRAXIS / PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES / PLATFORM: PC, OS X, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

At its heart, XCOM has always been a series about loss. Its very nature hinged upon the uphill battles the player fought, the troops they could permanently lose and sheer attrition of the long war, right down to a memorial for your casualties. Now, after all that, Firaxis opted to take away the world itself, declaring the player had lost the war. The experience was stripped down to its bare essentials, twisted to fit their new designs, and rebuilt as a darker, more cynical creation. Yet it's one that is irrefutably an XCOM experience on every level.

The story here is set several decades after the original game, with earth firmly in the iron grip of the aliens. Rather than defend the planet, your job now is to launch your own Terror Missions against them. Because of this, it's a definite step-up on its predecessor, most notably in terms of atmosphere. With XCOM now limited to a resistance movement, the story reflects this by remaining closer to Enemy Unknown's tutorial than that game's threadbare narrative. Chilling, tense and desperate, the cut scenes emphasise how there's never a moment you feel safe, and rarely a time you can really pause for breath. Thematically, this reflects the proactive focus, as you are no longer simply waiting for the aliens to up the ante and react. Instead, your goal is to seed nations with agents, steal supplies, and push back the ticking clock of the mysterious Avatar project.

Because of the new dynamic, the very way you are expected to conduct missions

has been radically altered. While time is at a standstill on the geoscape map, the moment you come into contact with a potential resource - from allied resistance groups to black market contacts - a new countdown starts. Stuck there for days, you are left risking alien attacks or even passing up vital opportunities to assault the aliens on their home turf. The instant you move however, your window of opportunity is gone and a vital opportunity to grab new guns, specialists or even food goes up in smoke.

The careful balancing act between survival and blowing up alien buildings serves as the backbone to the new game, taking elements from prior releases and rounding off past mistakes. Rightfully beloved as it was, Enemy Unknown was infamous for the frustrating inability to respond to more than one crisis at a time, always losing faith from someone. While sadly not offering the multitude of bases or response ships some would want, the older Terror Missions have been supplanted by Dark Events. Rather than just losing morale, several occur at a time across the world, and their impact can range from halving your income to directly attacking your base. So, how is this an improvement exactly? While this new dynamic might throw off some players to begin with, you can prepare and head off these events, finding ways to mitigate their impact. It's through handling these that you are truly allowed to fully go on the offensive towards the later stages of the game.

So, what about the combat itself? As before, it's recognisably XCOM with more than a few improvements. Immediately, the biggest upgrade is the removal of clusters of enemies hidden just out of sight. Rather than having passive units jumping out and yelling "hello!" with a hail of plasma bolts, enemy forces will instead follow patrol routes, only detecting enemy forces within a certain proximity. This allows you to set up various ambushes and sudden assaults, something you'll need quite badly as most old units are back with a vengeance. The cannon fodder Sectoids? They're now effectively armoured necromancers, capable of psychically animating dead troops. The Floaters? Unholy death-bringing archangels with firepower on par with a Cyberdisc. Oh, and the Sectopods? Same bullet-spongy armour, same damage output, but with the added fun of being able to stride over buildings, Martian walker style.

Thankfully, XCOM itself is hardly without a few fun upgrades. Resource starved as the organisation is, many new gimmicks put the old gadgets to shame with later upgrades making troops intangible, adding power weapons into the mix and stranger things beyond those. The fact they are so varied, and the classes so balanced, also allows for more creative freedom in the game. Rather than following set objectives, you really can build the base more or less however you want, without the game niggling you to finish something.

If this has sounded positive thus far, there's a definite reason for that. XCOM 2's failings are few and far between, and are all easily forgivable. The framerate might stutter at times but that hardly hinders a turn-based game, and the occasionally awkward camera angles are only rare occurrences. While human collaborators might be your primary enemy, this only makes it more tense once aliens show up, and allowed Firaxis to turn them into truly terrifying foes. Even the surprisingly limited gun progression, and simplistic base building, can be shrugged at thanks to the sheer versatility on offer. Simply put: There are no real flaws to be found here, just minor shortcomings.

With boundless replay value, a strong narrative and harsh but fair use of RNG, XCOM 2 is a must buy for 2016. Anyone even remotely invested in turn-based strategy would do well to grab a copy at the earliest opportunity.

CALLUM SHEPARD





GHOBSTBUSTERS: THE BOARD GAME

DESIGNERS: MATT HYRA, ADAM SBLENDORIO, MATAIO WILSON, ERIK BURNHAM / ARTISTS: SAMUEL H. GREENWELL, ROB MOMMAERTS, DAN SCHOENING / PUBLISHER: CRYPTOZOIC ENTERTAINMENT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With a Ghostbusters reboot on its way and nostalgia for all things '80s at its peak, it is inevitable that someone would turn Ghostbusters into a modern board game. That someone turned out to be Cryptozoic, who crowdfunded the game to the tune of a cool \$1.5million. With such a well-loved property and so many eager fans, the most common comment about this game before its release was one

very similar to what people are saying about the reboot: "It had better be good".

Luckily, Ghostbusters: The Board Game is rather fantastic, albeit in a very specific way. The game is very loosely based on the original movie, with a dash of recent spin-off media thrown in for good measure. That means it's the original team of Ray, Egon, Peter, and Winston. Erik Burnham

and Dan Schoening, who are better known for their work on IDW's Ghostbusters comics, designed the art and models. The result is both unique and instantly recognisable.

Ghostbusters: The Board Game is essentially a co-operative miniatures combat game. You take the role of one of the Ghostbusters and run round zapping monsters, trying to capture as many as you can, as the horrible things try to swamp Manhattan. This isn't just one simple board game with a single goal; rather it's lots of little adventures that combine into one big story; a bit like playing various levels of a video game. As the Ghostbusters succeed, they get stronger and more capable, and the monsters and scenarios become tougher. Each hero has their own unique ability; for example, Peter gets more powerful the more often he gets slimed, whereas Ray toughens up by helping out his buddies. This encourages teamwork, which makes it easier to crack the strategic elements of the various scenarios.

The game itself is quite nice, though some of the card pieces could be a little

sturdier. The playing pieces include some lovely sculpts; each Ghostbuster is instantly recognisable. ECTO-1, Slimer, and The Stay Puft Marshmallow Man are also very well done and would look nice as cubicle decorations if that is your thing. The rest of the ghosts (there are over 40 models in the set) are neat, but it's a pity they're all the same colour as they're a bit samey.

Overall, gameplay is smooth, easy to pick up, varied and fun and the bits that make up the game aren't bad either. Busting, as they say, makes you feel good.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★ 7



THARSIS

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: CHOICE PROVISIONS / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After a lengthy Early Access program, Tharsis finally hit Steam as a finished product, promising players a harsh survival digital board game aboard a lone colony ship travelling to Mars. With the odds stacked against you, risks of further disasters and supply shortages, this is the sort of game which makes FTL: Faster Than Light look like a walk in the park.

Let's be absolutely clear here: This game is designed to make you fail. You're not going to win from the word go and quite often you're going

to risk absolute failure even at the best of times, juggling between one crisis and the next. There's never a point where you're not putting the lives of your valued crew at risk or dealing with failing systems, and that's half the game's appeal. It offers that XCOM feel of fighting against all odds, desperately trying to claw your way to victory even as things turn against you. This is only enhanced by the variety of choices on offer, which can quickly tread into some very dark territory. After all, if one particular astronaut is going

insane and you're short on food, who is to say cannibalism is all that bad?

The actual menu system offers a good balance between showing areas of the ship and the choices on offer. Rather than using static images or basic information, environments will shift to reflect their status, and it helps to really enforce the idea that you're on a crumbling starship one hull breach away from annihilation.

Unfortunately, the main aspect that detracts from the game is, ironically, its greatest strength. Being largely dice-based and with high risks involved, it's extremely easy to fail. However, while there is depth and strategy to how you approach your current crisis, you're perpetually left at the tender mercies of lady luck. Often there's no real control you have short of dice rolls, meaning RNG dominates your every action. Physical board games like this such as Battlestar Galactica, Chaos In The Old World and Pandemic Legacy all have risk management based upon luck. However, they also have more mechanics that aren't based purely upon rolls of the dice as a fall-back, and however helpless

you feel, there's always a fighting chance. In this case, without that, you can feel understandably frustrated at how the game fails to reward careful planning or even long-term success.

This is by no means a bad game, but it could be a lot better. It's mechanically flawed, but if you're willing to endure the frustrating RNG dominating the game, there is a fun experience to be had in trying to keep your crew alive.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★ 6





LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

DEVELOPER: TT FUSION / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PC, PS3, PS4, PS VITA, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE, WII U, / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It seems people just can't get enough of smashing things into brightly coloured fragments of plastic these days. Having covered everything from Pirates of the Caribbean to Doctor Who, the Lego video game franchise has grabbed onto just about any big name franchise it could get its hands on. However, with this latest one, you'd be forgiven for starting to get just a little tired of the series' gimmicks.

Ultimately, this follows many of the same tropes and concepts as LEGO Marvel Superheroes, albeit with a more dedicated focus upon open world exploration. Rather than some of the more enclosed mission environments or villain lairs from the past games, players are expected to navigate the vast realms of the films. Along with the familiar home-base of the Helicarrier, the high fantasy

bastions of Asgard and Black Panther's home turf help to add a little more flavour here, offering a broader variety of visuals for anyone tired of the grey New York skylines. While they ultimately boil down to the same series of construction quests and punching henchmen until they explode, the fact that they're given a lick of paint goes some way to help keep things fresh.

Equally, the new ensemble of heroes breaks away from the traditional figures we've come to expect with Kamala Khan, Sam Wilson as Captain America and, unfortunately, the relentlessly shilled She-Thor all putting in an appearance. While those hoping for a few of the more truly obscure heroes from the '80s and '90s will be left disappointed, their presence at least helps to give the impression of the developer making full use of the source material.

Unfortunately, once you break past the new figures and new colours, you're mostly left with the same game as before. A smoother running and somewhat better looking

game to be sure, but if you're starting to get tired of the same old experience, this isn't going to change your mind. No one would be asking for them to reinvent the brick here, but with the perpetual simplicity of the puzzles and the brain-dead AI, there's little real challenge or push for real improvement of the game's core mechanics. The addition of Ubisoft open world clichés hardly helps matters and combined with the usual problems, it can make for a slow, ponderous experience.

Ultimately, LEGO Marvel's Avengers is unremarkable. It suffers from the Dynasty Warriors syndrome of splitting people down the middle, and you're either going to love the variety, ideas and jokes or you're going to be left wondering why so little has really changed since last time. Give it a look if the thought of a giant brick-built Hulk still gets a smirk out of you, but otherwise give it a pass.

CALLUM SHEPARD



PORTAL: THE UNCOOPERATIVE CAKE ACQUISITION GAME

PUBLISHER: CRYPTOZOIC ENTERTAINMENT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The video game Portal is best known for its dark humour and in-your-face puzzles. This combination of gallows humour and problem solving has made it one of the key touchstones in modern geek culture. So anyone trying to convert that into a

board game was always going to have a steep challenge.

Portal: The Uncooperative Cake Acquisition Game solves this issue by emulating the spirit of the video game, but not the content. The board game is set sometime before

the first edition of Portal, and you sort of take the role of the crazy Artificial Intelligence GLADoS as you perform lethal experiments on lab volunteers.

The set up for the game is this: there are three 'tracks' of experimental rooms. The rooms at one end of the board are constantly being destroyed and they are replenished at the other end. Each player picks a team, and the person who has the most volunteers in a room when it is destroyed wins the awards in that room. This is usually more volunteers, but it can be cake. Whomever has the most cake when any player loses all their volunteers, wins. Event cards are also drawn each turn, which can adjust the rules of the game.

Oh, and to cap it all off, there's a companion cube, which is so adorable it distracts your volunteers, and a roaming sentry turret that only wants to help you. With bullets. Broadly, this is a fast-moving puzzle game that lets you screw over your friends in the nicest possible way. For cake.

The games contents are also pretty neat. The actual playing pieces are solidly designed, look like they belong

in the video game and are nice to look at. The 'cake' pieces look good enough to eat, but don't play the game with actual cake or you'll make yourself ill; cake happens a lot in this game. The board pieces are interlocking hexes, and though they could do with being thicker, they work fairly well for what they are.

Overall, Portal: The Uncooperative Cake Acquisition Game would be a fun game without the Portal theme. But it's so much more fun because of it, and we are glad to learn that the old tradition of turning video games into board games is still alive.

ED FORTUNE



RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

BLAST CORPS (N64, 1997)

If you've ever browsed through the N64 section at your local retro shop/favourite online store, chances are you'll have skimmed past countless copies of this one and thought something along the lines of "*I'm not buying that, it's super cheap so it's probably not very good*". We're here to tell you to put those preconceptions to one side on this occasion - *Blast Corps* really is quite a special game.

Developed by Rare and originally released at a budget price (which explains why there are so many copies of it around today), *Blast Corps* gives players almost 80 3D levels full of obstacles that need to be destroyed in order to secure a safe route for an out of control nuclear missile carrier. Don't let it crash or it's game over! A variety of vehicles and mech suits are at your disposal throughout each level, starting off with just one or two vehicles in the early stages and progressing to more

and more difficult and inventive scenarios later in the game.

After a handful of tutorial levels to introduce the various mechanics that will come into play, the first few stages are a relatively straightforward matter of driving your truck around and crashing into buildings to knock them down to the ground. It won't stay that way for long though. Just as you get used to the controls (which can be a bit tricky at first), the game throws new rules at you - some buildings can only be destroyed by colliding with them in a certain way, and later levels will see you switch between multiple vehicles to complete the level. Whether you're power-sliding into a building, pushing crates of TNT around, blowing things up with your own missiles, activating cranes or even building bridges, most vehicles have their own unique abilities and it's up to you to work out what to do! And let's not forget those mech suits, especially one particular favourite that allows you to fly up into the air and destroy

objects on the ground by crashing down on them from a great height...

There really aren't that many action/driving/puzzle games around, and if we're honest, it's probably a genre we never even knew we wanted. If you're looking for something a bit different, you could definitely do worse than picking this one up.

MONSTER WORLD IV (MEGA DRIVE, 1994)

Here's another slightly odd one - the final title in the *Wonder Boy/Monster World* spin-off series, which not only didn't get released outside of its native Japan until a few years ago, but also doesn't even include *Wonder Boy* in the actual game. We seem to have picked a right bunch of peculiarities this month!

Wonder Boy was born in Japanese arcades in 1986 and went on to appear in six different games over the next eight years, most of which were released on/ported over to Sega's home systems (although thanks to a slightly confusing licensing agreement, *Wonder Boy* himself might be familiar to Nintendo fans through his appearances in the *Adventure Island* series). While the original game was a platformer set on a tropical island, later titles shifted their focus to a more medieval/fantasy setting (that'll be the 'Monster World', then...) and added a few light RPG elements into the mix. The series took a rather unexpected turn with *Monster World IV*, opting for a Middle Eastern setting instead of the murky castles of previous games and swapping *Wonder Boy* for a new protagonist, a young lady by the name of Asha. Despite these changes, all things considered, it's probably the most accomplished release in the *Monster World* series.

So what's it all about? Our heroine, Asha, has the ability to communicate with the spirit world. After finding out that the spirits are in danger, it's your job to guide Asha around the land to find out exactly what's going on. The entire game plays out as a 2D platformer, split into overworld locations and underground dungeons. In the overworld, Asha can speak to townsfolk and get hints about what to do next or where to find valuable upgrades, while the dungeons are filled with monsters, puzzles and hidden secrets that can help (or hinder) your progress. Defeated enemies drop coins that can be used to stock up on useful items in the next village, and there are various

pick-ups dotted around the place that can replenish and extend your health bar. Advancing the combat from previous *Monster World* titles, Asha is able to pull off a variety of moves such as upward and downward sword slashes, along with using a shield to block incoming attacks. Asha also has a cute little companion which can be used to double-jump and interact with items and that sort of thing.

The game itself is very linear, which in some cases can be a good thing because it means there are no opportunities for getting lost. Each town is laid out along a straight road, with the only real exploration taking place inside the various dungeons. And you really do need to make sure you pick up everything you might need before taking on a boss, as dungeons are locked forever after the boss has been defeated. In particular, be sure to collect those life bar-extending items because you're definitely going to need them!

It might all sound like fairly standard stuff, but the gameplay mechanics combined with the colourful locations and interesting cast of characters really do make this a standout title. Original Mega Drive copies of *Monster World IV* are only available in Japanese, but check out the Virtual Console or PS3/360 marketplaces if you're interested in trying out the English version.

MISCHIEF MAKERS (N64, 1997)

Back to the N64 for this month's final title, *Mischief Makers* is an inventive and massively underrated '2.5D' puzzler/platformer from the developers at Treasure, the people behind such classics as *Gunstar Heroes*, *Ikaruga* and - (yes!) the absolutely incredible and completely wonderful *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure*.

Professor Theo has been kidnapped by the maniacal Emperor of Planet Clancer, who wants to use the Professor's knowledge in his quest to take over the world. Players take control of one of the Professor's creations, a robotic maid named Marina (Ultra-InterGalactic-Cybot G. Marina Liteyears, if we're using her full title!), and head out on a quest to save the Professor and take down the evil Emperor.

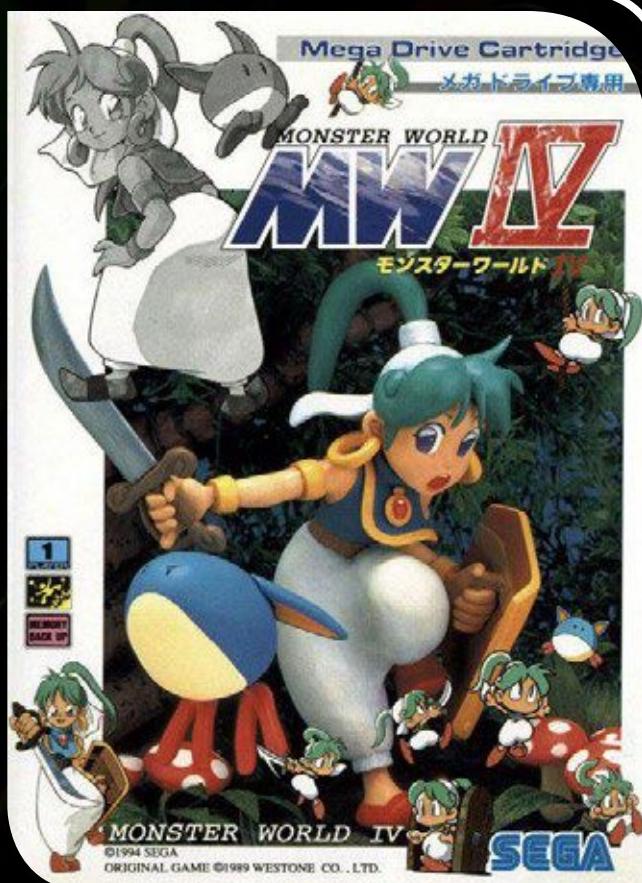
This is no run of the mill 'dash through the level and jump on all the baddies' affair though, as Treasure came up with a pretty interesting gameplay mechanic that really sets *Mischief Makers* apart from pretty much any other

platformer. Alongside the usual jumping, boosting, hovering, and rolling mechanics that will be familiar from many other platform games, almost all of the objects in each level of *Mischief Makers* can be grabbed, picked up, or shaken, which leads to a whole host of interestingly innovative situations (as well as Marina's

adorably enthusiastic cry of 'shake shake!', which surprisingly never gets annoying). Shaken enemies might drop loot or take you on a ride across a level, or even have an effect on the level itself such as rotating the screen or flipping the entire stage upside down.

Mischief Makers features a welcome mixture of puzzles and straightforward platforming throughout its five worlds (each of which contains around 10-12 different levels), and there are plenty of bosses and mini-bosses to contend with. The level design is absolutely immaculate, with each stage offering enough of a challenge without being overly harsh and boss battles offering several 'eureka' moments when you finally work out how you're expected to defeat them. Throw in some nice colourful cutsey graphics (which may be off-putting to some, but again, put your preconceptions to one side!) and a catchy soundtrack and you're onto a winner with this one.

It's amazing to think that the very first side-scrolling platformer to be released on the N64 is also quite possibly the absolute best one. What's also amazing is the fact that *Mischief Makers* has been largely forgotten, remaining a hidden gem due to the fact that it has never been released on any compilations or even on Nintendo's own Virtual Console. Unboxed copies can be picked up relatively cheaply these days, and we strongly advise platforming fans to track this one down as quickly as possible. Shake shake!



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



There's nothing quite as entertaining and warm as a board game; most of us learn to play games like this as kids, and there's something innately relaxing about chilling out with good company and getting some dice rolled. For most of us, tabletop gaming is a relaxing activity for home (or a good gaming club/bar).

So, it may come as a bit of a surprise that one of the most popular genres in the world of board gaming is horror and suspense. Images of zombies and alien monsters litter the shelves of games stores the world over, but in most cases these terrors simply serve as the monster to beat, rather than anything that is actually scary. There are some notable exceptions, and these tend to be prized by gamers for the uncommon and frightening gems that they are. One classic example is the *Fury of Dracula*, now back in print and on its third edition.

It's an odd but extremely immersive game, based on the original novel by Bram Stoker, although it also owes an awful lot of its general coolness to the Hammer Horror movies. *Fury* has an odd sort of set-up. One of you takes on the role of

Dracula, and it's your job to spread your influence and power across Europe; you do this by making lots of other vampires and murdering your enemies. Everyone else plays one of your foes. The set-up is that Dracula has returned from the crypt following his defeat at the hands of Van Helsing and chums. He's now loose in the world, and it's up to the hunters to find the fiend before he takes over the world.

Obviously, the board is a big map of Victorian-era Europe and a rather gorgeous one at that. *Fury* is a hidden movement game; the hunters all have little playing pieces that get to wander around the board, taking in the sights of Frankfurt and Cologne, or Milan and Marseilles, or even London. Meanwhile, Dracula lurks in the shadows and isn't on the board. The vampire moves via a deck of cards, which feature a printed location. The bloodsucking fiend plays these face down, into six spaces along the top of the board. That's his trail. As the hunters move around, more of the trail is revealed. Clues on the card allow the players to guess possible future locations, and off the hunters rush to kill the monster.

Unfortunately for the heroes, Dracula is hardly a pushover. He's very strong and is much more durable than the combined might of the hunters; only a concerted effort from everyone will take him down. Taking on Dracula without the help from the other players is almost a guarantee of doom.

Fury of Dracula first came out all the way back in 1987 and was published by Games Workshop. '87 was an interesting year for the high street gaming juggernaut. They were still innovating, and were creating newfangled new games and ideas back then, and 1987 would see a load of fresh ideas getting turned into games, including the likes of *Rogue Trooper*, *Chaos Marauders*, and *Chainsaw Warrior*. It also saw the appearance of a thing called *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader* - whatever happened to that, I wonder?

The first edition of *Fury* was designed for fewer players, and the heroes were pretty much interchangeable. The pieces were also smaller and less durable. There were some really cool metal playing pieces available, but only if you were savvy enough to pick up one of the limited edition boxes - or order the pieces from GW's headquarters, which you could still do up until about a decade ago. Still, back then, as now, the game itself was utterly gorgeous.

The second edition arrived in 2005, and Fantasy Flight Games had picked up the game for publication. Pedants should note that the first edition of *Fury of Dracula* was called *The Fury of Dracula*. By 2005, they'd dropped the first word, though I couldn't tell you why. Maybe they thought it was cooler that way? Fantasy Flight did what it always does in situations like this; they looked at the components first and made them more robust and prettier. Then they revised the rules to



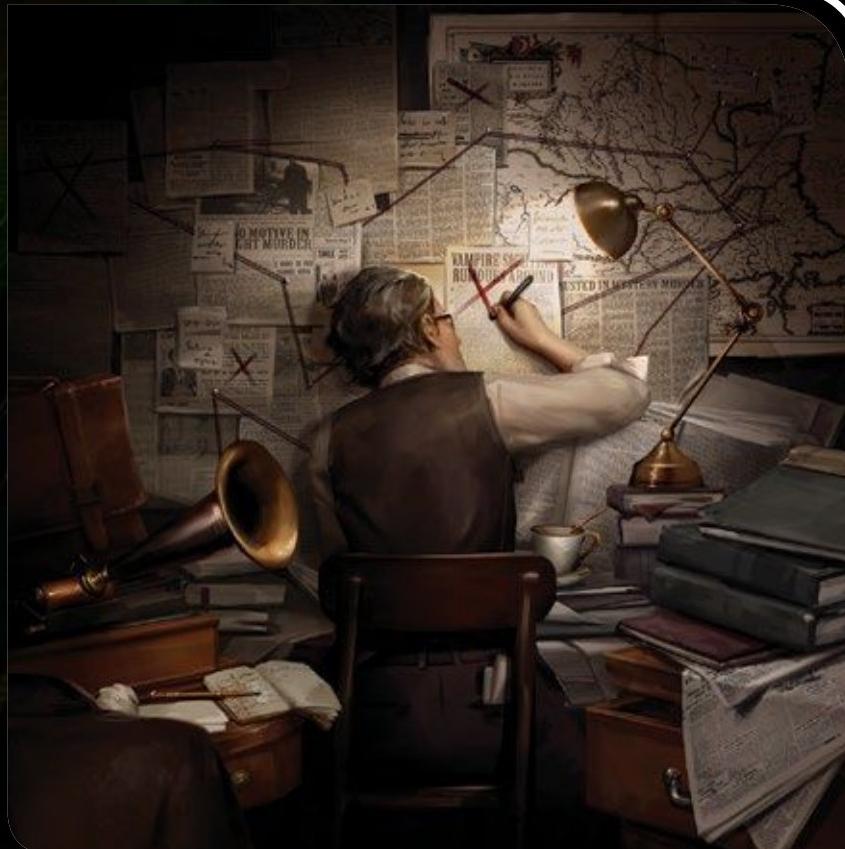
make them smoother and more playable. It sold out pretty quickly and became the pride of place in many a gaming clubs stock cupboard. It also revived interest in the old edition, and given that old Games Workshop releases are so out of print that you need a time machine to own some of them, *Fury* quickly became one of those top ten 'Must Have' games for geeks who wanted bragging rights.

The third edition came out late last year, to the relief of many a wannabe vampire hunter. It's pretty much a reprint, but a nice one. There are a few slight additions and changes to the rules that make things easier. The pieces are yet again quite pretty, and the map/board is rather lovely. The art is appropriately atmospheric without suffering too much from the moody darkness that a lot of horror games experience. Despite being a game with many complex underlying mechanics, it's fun to play and once you've got your head round it, quite easy to get into. For example, they've added train tickets as a way of making it simple to move around and removed more byzantine mechanics. Theme and ease of play are core concepts here, making this very smooth.

Most significantly, combat has been refined into something straightforward and exciting. The first edition was messy (and a bit boring), and this version fixes all that by adding tonnes of new weapons and fancy moves. Ever fancied stopping Dracula from mesmerising Mina Harker by shooting him in the face, only to have the fiend fly away as a bat? That's pretty much how the fights go now.

Fury of Dracula is the game where you and your team of plucky comrades race across Eastern Europe via boat and steam train, only to discover that the monster has turned some innocent young thing into the undead. While you're busy trying to fix that mess, he turns into a flipping wolf and starts to make his way back to dear old England.

It's an awful lot of fun though you really need to have five people present to get the most out of it. At the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome, we currently select who gets to play Dracula by voting on who can do the best Christopher Lee impersonation, but trust me, it's one of the games you'll want to play from both angles at some point.



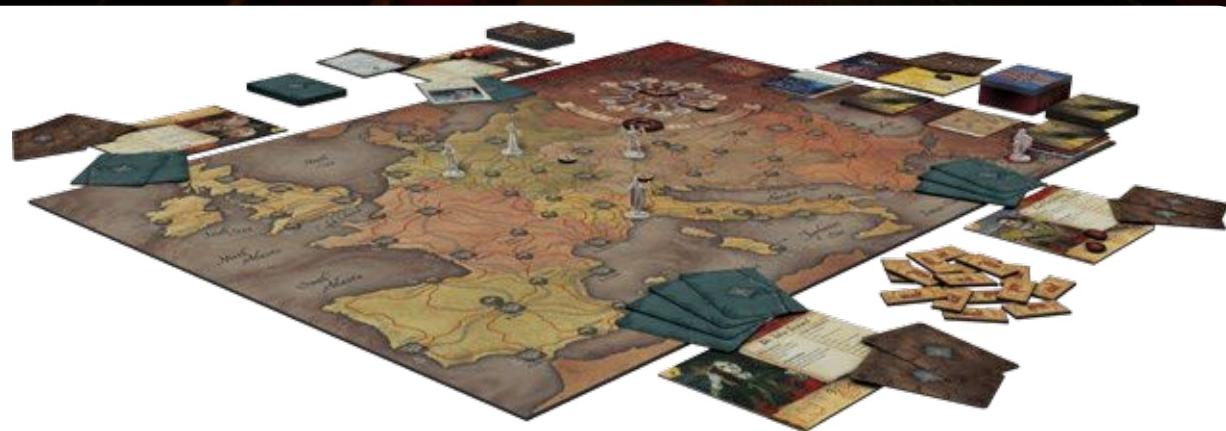
In other news, it may come as no surprise that the people behind *Cards Against Humanity* have successfully crowdfunded their next big project. *Secret Hitler* is a bluffing game in the tradition of card games such as *Masquerade* and *Coup*. Set in 1930s Germany, the aim of *Secret Hitler* is either to put the fascist leader into power or root him out and stop him. Players are secretly divided into two teams - liberals and fascists. Each round, players elect a President and a Chancellor who will work together to enact a law from a random deck. Get enough change to totalitarian laws proposed, and the fascists win, and vice versa. Alternately, the liberals can try to bump off the fascist leader before he gets too much power and popular support behind him.

Much like last time, the games

creators have made the whole thing available as a free download, and the gameplay is pretty smooth; but much like *Cards Against Humanity*, you'll probably want the professionally printed set. It's going to come with some sweet looking components and a small comic strip explaining 1930s Germany and what the situation was. The success of this game has also prompted the firm to launch a new company to manage projects like this, called Goat, Wolf, and Cabbage LLC. Top marks if you recognise the name; it's a reference to a classic logic puzzle.

Until next month, keep on rolling those dice!

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at [@ed_fortune](https://twitter.com/ed_fortune) and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



THE BEST SCARVES IN THE WHONIVERSE

The Doctor has always had an eclectic taste in fashion. And now, Lovarzi has created some fantastic *Doctor Who*-inspired products for the modern day Time Lord.

FOURTH DOCTOR KNITTED TIE £24.99

This smart tie is a great companion to a sharp suit or stylish shirt, wherever you go, whatever the weather. Just make sure you've got some jelly babies with you too.

DALEK SCARF (AVAILABLE IN TEAL OR GREY) £36.99

This exclusive scarf is ideal for keeping you warm in the snowy climes of Tranquil Repose, the Dalek Asylum - or even Earth!

FOURTH DOCTOR SHORTENED SCARF £24.99

We think this is a brilliant idea. Want all the style and sophistication of Tom Baker without the hazardous length of his scarf? Here is a superbly made, two-metre long version.

FOURTH DOCTOR SEASON 18 BURGUNDY SCARF £29.99

First seen in 1980's *The Leisure Hive*, Tom Baker's Doctor got a fresh new look for Season 18, his final set of stories. In this Burgundy Scarf, he battled vampires, his own spiky duplicate, Marshmen, and the Master; journeyed into E-Space; met some new friends - and relaxed on Brighton beach!



SEVENTH DOCTOR SILK PAISLEY SCARF £36.99

Worn by Sylvester McCoy from 1987's *Time and the Rani* to the classic series' conclusion with 1989's *Survival*, Lovarzi also offer the Seventh Doctor's hankie, jumper, and even his umbrella.

FOURTH DOCTOR FULL LENGTH SCARF £49.99

Perfect for casual and hardcore fans, cosplayers and Christmas presents, this stunning Doctor Who Scarf is truly iconic. Worn by the Doctor from 1974 to 1981, now you, too, can battle Daleks, Cybermen and Sontarans in style!

ALL PRODUCTS AVAILABLE FROM LOVARZI.CO.UK

Use discount code STARBURST10 to get 10% off all of their products. Hurry, offer valid until the end of February only! | AK



A SHIRT TO DIE FOR

In between issues, the world was treated to the Bohemian 'Rhapsodding' brilliant trailer for David Ayer's *Suicide Squad*. Featuring plenty of craziness, Ayer's adaptation of the DC Comics ensemble looks refreshingly distinctive from the by-the-formula superhero genre crowd. Whatever people may think of Jared Leto's Joker, Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn, etc, we cannot deny the hype. So get even more hyped with this brilliant shirt from 5600 at [redbubble.com](#), which features a pattern print of all those awesome skull designs of the superher-err... we mean supervillain leads in the film that have decorated the posters.

PATTERN SQUAD T-SHIRT - £20.67
AVAILABLE FROM [REDBUBBLE.COM](#)



RIP DAVID BOWIE AND ALAN RICKMAN

We were shocked to hear of the passing of influential musician/artist/actor David Bowie and towering British actor Alan Rickman last month (f**k cancer!). So in this commemorative corner of Watto's Emporium, we choose two pieces of gear that fantastically remind us of these two legends. The first, motivated by Jim Henson's beloved 1986 fantasy *Labyrinth*, is this unisex sweater from [truffleshuffle.co.uk](#), which celebrates Bowie's antagonist The Goblin King and might even instigate a chorus of 'Magic Dance!' And the second is a dream come true. A shirt inspired by 'that line' in the vastly genius 1999 sci-fi parody/homage *Galaxy Quest*, starring Alan Rickman as the scene-stealing annoyed thespian Alexander Dane, famous for playing Dr Lazarus in a cult - and often quoted (to his dismay) - TV show. "By Grabthar's Hammer, what a savings" indeed. Rickman and Bowie in these works (and countless others) won our joy, our admiration, and our hearts. Thank you for the memories.

DAWN OF MERCH

This issue has already talked at length about that little indie film nobody will probably go see called, oh, what is it again? Ah, that's right, *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice* (no, we're still not sold on that title either) (see page 12). However, the time for talking is nearing an end and come March 25th, we will see whether Zack Snyder has done justice (ahem) to the World's Finest. Until then, you can let the world know whose side you're on, by heading on over to [beltsbucklestees.com](#). Our personal favourite items include: the Superman Laplander Hat (winter isn't over yet, folks!) and the Batman logos-through-history shirt.

But it's not just all about the brooding blokes, because a certain kick-ass gal [Gadot] makes her way into the fray as Wonder Woman makes her theatrical début. So might we suggest picking up the beautifully designed Wonder Woman purse, which sadly doesn't allow you to lasso criminals (well, it's not made for that anyway) but does celebrate the female patriot in all her glory. Heck, even poor old Aquaman (also appearing in the film) gets a slice of this merchandising cake (although we're reliably informed he prefers fish & chips) with the rather neat Aquaman belt buckle! Choose a side peeps, because all hell is about to break loose as this League arrives in March... why does that sound so appropriate? Hmm.

SUPERMAN HAT (LOGO LAPLANDER) - £15
BATMAN T-SHIRT- LOGO HISTORY - £17
WONDER WOMAN PURSE- LOGO WITH CHAIN RED - £15
AQUAMAN BELT BUCKLE- LOGO - £15
ALL AVAILABLE FROM [BELTSBUCKLESTEES.COM](#)



LABYRINTH SWEATER -
£39.99 - AVAILABLE FROM
[TRUFFLESHUFFLE.CO.UK](#)

GRABTHAR'S HAMMER T-SHIRT -
\$20 USD - AVAILABLE FROM
[OFFWORLDDESIGNS.COM](#)



PAUL MOUNT'S



This month, we seek out THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE and time-travel (after a fashion) with SHERLOCK...

Apparently, Amazon Prime's *The Man in The High Castle* resided in Development Hell at the BBC for a while back in 2010 in the form of a proposed four-part adaptation executive-produced by Ridley Scott before drifting over to Syfy in 2013 and finally rocking up as a lavish and atmospheric single episode in last year's Amazon pilot season. Successful enough to earn a full ten-episode commission, *The Man in The High Castle* has now properly arrived – Ridley Scott is still involved but former *X-Files* scribe Frank Spotnitz is now credited as 'creator' and co-exec producer (he also wrote the first two episodes). So it's

been a longish wait for the series, based on Philip K. Dick's 1962 novel, to reach the screen and whilst it's indisputably been worth waiting for, it's hard not to shake off the feeling that maybe the BBC had the right idea all along as the story really only seems to have enough decent meat for a handful of episodes rather than the ten we've already got (and with another series on the way).

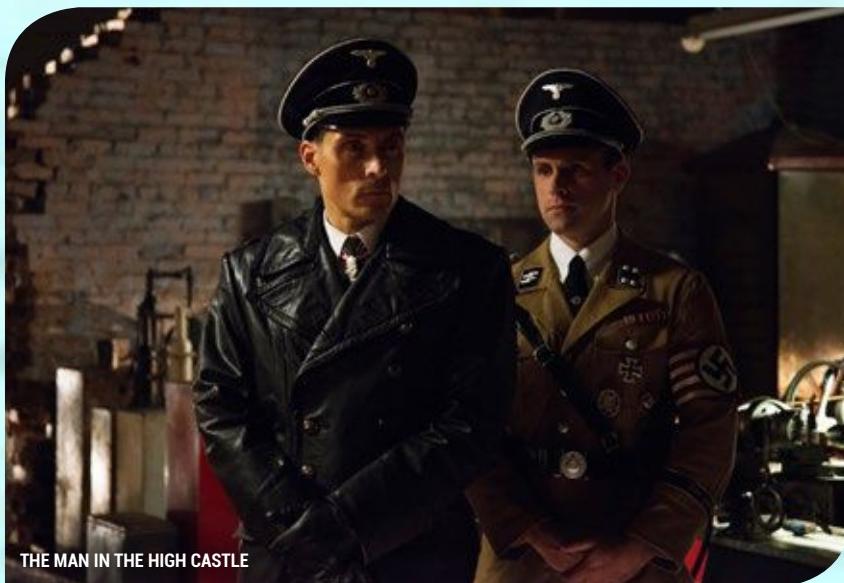
So we're in a grim, dystopian alternative-Earth USA in 1962 where the Nazi/Japanese alliance won World War II, and America is now segregated into three distinct sections; the Pacific States of America, west of the Rockies, is little more than a Japanese puppet

state, the eastern half of the country is firmly under the Nazi jackboot, and there's a 'neutral zone' in the middle, which acts as a buffer between the two. The story broadly follows the efforts of members of a surreptitious Resistance movement to protect and disseminate mysterious newsreel footage collected by a source known only as 'The Man in the High Castle' which chronicles a very different timeline in which the Allies won the Second World War, and the Axis powers were defeated. Many dismiss the reels as fanciful and worthless works of fiction, but others suspect that perhaps they detail life in an alternative reality and an entirely different course of human history. But what the series doesn't get around to really explaining is why the newsreels are quite so significant and what their existence can do to subvert the post-war status quo and, perhaps most importantly of all, exactly who 'the Man in the High Castle' is. The series also suggests that there may be a number of different timelines as certainly many of the events referred to in the newsreels are different again to history as we know it.

There's a definite sense that *The Man in the High Castle* is in it for the long haul and won't be up for surrendering its secrets in a hurry. This does, unfortunately, result in the show generally moving at a snail's pace, revelling in its astonishing, super-budget production design (hard to image how the show might have looked if a cash-strapped BBC version had gone ahead) and focusing on mood and atmosphere rather than pace and action. The characters are a little bland and generic, the usual confection of double agents, reluctant heroes and gruff Nazi officers one of whom, immaculately played by Rufus Sewell, is American-born and, despite his Nazi loyalties, lives the alt-Earth version of the safe, suburban



THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE



THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE

American wife 'n' kids family dream. The cast are all pretty solid, to give them their due, from Alexa Davalos as Juliana Crain, a young San Franciscan, who is dragged into the Resistance movement when her sister passes on one of the secret film-reels shortly before she is brutally gunned down in the street. Luke Kleintank (seriously) is conflicted double agent Joe Blake, who, as the series progresses, comes to question his loyalties and beliefs, and former *Torchwood* star Burn Gorman is chilling as bounty hunter The Marshall, remorselessly tracking down concentration camp escapees.

So, *The Man in the High Castle* is a powerful, vivid series and despite the fact that the story rarely moves at much more

than a crawl, it eventually - and it takes an episode or three - becomes richly-rewarding and engrossing, largely because of the astonishing attention to detail that has gone into its production. This alternate world is depicted as a flattened, drab, defeated society where technological advancement has ground to a halt (as a way for the victors to keep the population under even greater control?), everything is bleached out in greys and browns and even the Nazi/Japan alliance appears to be wobbling, casting another great shadow over the future of the human race. There seems to be a lot of story going on here, but in reality, much of it is still only being hinted at, there are mysteries that are to be investigated, secrets to be revealed and truths to be explored. Inevitably, this makes

the series look as if it's treading water or is dragging out what might appear to be a thin narrative - it certainly doesn't surprise very often. The storytelling is pretty linear, and the show seems to be concerned only with giving you what you might expect and nothing more.

But none of this is really criticism. *The Man in the High Castle* is actually science fiction for people who don't much care for science fiction, rooting itself in a 'what if?' world, which makes it more like accessible, respectable speculative fiction than hardcore science fiction. Networks and streaming services are keener than ever to find franchises that can run and run (and even proposed one-off 'event' series are finding themselves dragged out way beyond their anticipated lifespan), but sometimes a story is just a story, and when it's told, it's time to end it. *The Man in the High Castle* is an impressive achievement, a real immersive visual experience, and yet it's one that could have generated a real buzz if it had hitched up its skirts, tightened up its act and not turned a fairly brief novel into something much more languorous and drawn-out. As it is, Amazon is likely to be keen to drag out the search for *The Man in the High Castle* for as long as possible, which is all well and good, but they risk turning a powerful and thought-provoking cautionary tale into another (vaguely) sci-fi soap opera. It's a story that truly deserves so much more by being a whole lot less.

SHERLOCK

My alarm bells started ringing a couple of years back when Steven Moffat (yep, him again), co-creator of BBC

VIEWING NOTES



Flop film franchise *The Mortal Instruments* makes the transition to the small screen in *Shadowhunters*, another 'Netflix Original' series and, on the basis of its competent first couple of episodes, looks like providing safe, salty *Buffy*-influenced action-packed spooky fun; full of monsters and moody, sultry teens for that all-important YA demographic...

ITV has spent well north of £30 million - imagine the frothing furore from certain corners of the press if this was the BBC - on two lavish family-based fantasy shows and has, extraordinarily, killed them both by scheduling them in a clearly inappropriate early evening Sunday night slot. What's particularly amazing is that, having seen Charlie Higson's lively, promising *Jekyll and Hyde* sink like a stone, ITV has blindly thrown *Beowulf: Return to the Shieldlands* into exactly the same timeslot and been rewarded with even lower audiences! But then, as it turns out, *Beowulf* isn't much cop, a *Game of Thrones* wannabe with all the bits people like in *Game of Thrones* missing because it's not aimed at the same audience. More proof that fantasy TV doesn't figure highly on the menu of UK TV viewers or that ITV really is as brain-dead as its continuing obsessions with Simon Cowell and Ant & Dec suggest it...

I am figuratively - and possibly even literally - shaking my fist in the general direction of Fox in the US on the news that a second series of *Wayward Pines*,

one of the outstanding TV event series of 2015 has been commissioned. Why can't they just leave well enough alone? It was a great story, succinctly done and dusted in ten sharp episodes and we really don't need to diminish its impact by going back and trying to recreate the magic all over again. I'm not 'appy! But I daresay I'll be watching...

Quietly impressed with Sky 1's new ten-part drama *Stan Lee's Lucky Man*, which stars James Nesbitt as a down-at-heels police officer up to his neck in gambling debts who comes into the possession of a mystical and un-removable bracelet that gives him permanent good luck; slick and stylish, it's basically a fairly routine UK police procedural dressed up with an interesting supernatural twist and bolstered by the casting of the engaging Nesbitt as DI Harry Clayton. Worth sticking with...

Steven Moffat is surrendering his post as showrunner of *Doctor Who*. I have no further comment to make at this time, but I just wanted to savour the words because I never thought I'd get to write them...



SHERLOCK

ALSO SCREENING



MARVEL'S DAREDEVIL

Charlie Cox returns as the Matt Murdock, the blind lawyer-turned-night-time vigilante Daredevil in the hotly anticipated second season of the rapturously received TV superhero series. This year, Ol' Hornhead will battle Jon Bernthal's Punisher and come face-to-face with Elodie Yung as Elektra.

From March 18th on Netflix.

BETTER CALL SAUL

Bob Odenkirk continues Jimmy McGill's journey towards his sleazy alter ego Saul Goodman in the second season of the peerless *Breaking Bad* spin-off/prequel.

Now Available on Netflix.

HOUSE OF CARDS

Kevin Spacey returns as Frank Underwood in the fourth season of the compulsive US political drama.

From March 4th on Netflix.

One's whip-crack-smart modern-day reinvention of Conan Doyle's Great Detective described BBC One's *Sherlock* as "a series about a detective rather than a detective series." Sounded like a handy 'get out of jail free' card for that moment - tiresomely inevitable in a Moffat-led series - when the well has run dry. We saw the first tangible signs of diminishing returns in the third series (remembering, of course that each series of *Sherlock* consists of just three feature-length episodes) in which two of the episodes had no actual plot, just lots of smug and self-satisfied scenes of Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch... steady, girls) and John Watson (Martin Freeman) bantering at one another in the way that only 'characters' in Steven Moffat scripts do. It was, ironically, only the final episode of the run, written by Moffat himself, which made Series Three worth sticking with at all. The series, you'll recall (it was two years ago, after all), ended with Holmes apparently flying off into exile to avoid a murder trial and his old enemy Moriarty (Andrew Scott) appearing on TV screens all over London boasting to his nemesis that he's still alive and kicking. *Quelle cliffhanger!*

If we expected the New Year's Day special *The Abominable Bride* to offer any explanations or resolutions, then we were to be sorely disappointed. In fact, nothing at all happened in the episode; in real terms, it began with Holmes still sitting on the plane and it ended with him getting off it. In between, Moffat and co-conspirator Mark Gatiss concocted a fanciful yarn set in Holmes' 'mind palace' (another typical Moffat affectation) where he imagined himself and Watson as Victorian detectives striding through smog-choked London streets and tackling the impossible mystery of a dead bride resurrected and murdering her terrified husband. This, it appears, was to help him figure out if

Moriarty could have possibly survived blowing his own brains out in front of Holmes himself (conclusion: no, he couldn't have) but the conceit really just allowed Moffat and co. to smugly wrong-foot the audience who might have been led to expect some actual coherent and believable reason for Holmes and Watson to suddenly tog up like their literary stereotypes.

Much wailing and gnashing of teeth followed the transmission of *The Abominable Bride*, the general consensus being that, as with his work on *Doctor Who*, Moffat's now incapable or unwilling to tell a proper story, preferring instead to show how clever he is by trying to bamboozle the audience with his mind-bending, time-twisting self-indulgent twaddle. The *Sherlock* special scored an audience of over 11 million in the UK, but many of them weren't happy and seemed to share the view that the show (and its writer) has become a little too big for its own boots and I'd be willing to bet my deerstalker and curled pipe collection that when the next series finally arrives - sometime in 2017 - a lot of the fans who enjoyed this witty, irreverent and clever take on a familiar character when it first appeared in 2010, are now heartily fed up with the show's creator showing off in public rather than just trying to tell a good tall tale. *The Abominable Bride*, its storyline possibly compromised by the need to mark time until the series can resume properly, forcing Moffat to select 'it's all a dream' from his well-used Bumper Book of Handy Clichés, wasn't completely abominable - as a production it's far too classy to be a total write-off - but at times (either Victorian or 21st century) - it drifted perilously close. +

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount

it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

2015. What a tough act to follow. Yet, here I am again, welcoming the New Year with a quite extraordinary movie indeed. Although the buzz may be all about *The Revenant*, whose director Alejandro G. Iñárritu kicked off 2015 with the ground-breaking opus that was *Birdman*, it is a much lower budgeted fare that has both entertained and moved me, whilst at the very same time has also confounded my expectations. The plot of *Room* would seem to be a straightforward abduction horror/revenge flick, but those of you expecting a similar beat to *I Spit on Your Grave* will be both disappointed, and served up a treat you were not prepared for. Having not read the book by Emma Donoghue (which some are saying is more gifted with nuances), I went in knowing very little and totally managed to avoid major plot spoilers (an achievement in itself when you edit a magazine full of these movies). I can fully recommend going in blind, as it were. It's too good a treat to have ruined.

The basic story of *Room* is rooted in the many abduction-based *video nasties* of the eighties, but any further similarities are quickly dispensed with at the end of the first act, as a bid for freedom changes the focus of the entire film over to the difficult subject of how a stranger to our world tries to make sense of everything. At the start of the film, the young woman Joy has been held captive as the sex toy of a pervert in *Room*. She has been missing for over five years, and during this period, she has had to raise and protect the male child progeny of her captor. For anyone who has a pro-life stance, and has agreed with the right of a victim of rape not to go ahead with the pregnancy, may find their basic assumptions challenged by the intelligent way that this uncomfortable subject is dealt with here. Whilst Joy is the main character it is five-year-old Jack who quickly becomes the primary focus as events unfold. For Jack has never seen the outside world except for on television. Joy has had to lie to him, contaminate his learning curve in order for him to be able to cope with the confinement. He thinks there is nothing beyond their four walls, and things on television, merely make believe. It is not a spoiler in any way to inform you that Jack does indeed have to come to terms with the outside world, and other people. In what can only be described as an acting tour de force



2016 gets off to a flying start with the intelligent and emotive - ROOM

by nine-year-old actor Jacob Tremblay, the world is explored and examined with a sense of wonder that literally glows off the screen. His performance is really that good. There are incredible scenes where Jack misses the comfort and order of *Room*, and clearly finds the disorder of our world even scarier at first.

Brie Larson is also great in her role, with just the right balance when it comes to the later scenes in which the gravity of her experiences finally begins to take its toll. These scenes are played with a very delicate touch, allowing her character to lash out but not at the cost of our sympathy. It all plays out in a very natural manner. A tough job when dealing with subject matter of this sensitive type.

As I said earlier, the focus does switch away from any perceived revenge that we may all understandably crave on Joy and Jack's behalf. This is the true genius at work here. Instead of justice, we end up breaking the perceived chain of cyclical violence meted out in these kinds of films, chiefly because this isn't that kind of film, it's something else entirely. It's a parable about our own humanity and how brave people can often find bizarre ways of coping with dark times. Methods that only ever make sense in the middle of the darkness. The way in which *Room* allows the horror to just melt away in order to tell

a much more important story is the very definition of brave filmmaking.

I brushed over the subject of the rape victim and her attitude to her tormentor's child that they share. This is dealt with in a way that really made me stop and think. She has an answer for a journalist that tries to probe into her feelings on this. She gives the only possible answer. One that just makes sense and further underlines the maturity of the writing and direction. The negative point of view is also postured by a fleeting performance from the great William H. Macy as Joy's father, whose reluctance to accept the situation is also equally understandable, but in equal measure heartbreaking. Another great performance in a film percolated with them. There is literally not one actor in *Room* who is anything less than totally credible and authentic.

Room may not be for everyone, but it is a gifted movie that genuinely has something to say about the world in which we live, and our own perceptions of it. It has been nominated rightly for an Oscar for Best Picture, and I genuinely think it has earned it. It's got heart, soul, and a message. It's a movie that challenges the hardest of hearts not to get choked up, and the most stubborn of minds to consider a rethink on some big issues. In a simple tear-jerking scene involving Jack telling his Grandma

that he loves her, he makes a connection with our world. You all need to connect with this film.

Back in the very early nineties **Reservoir Dogs** was a little movie **STARBURST** brought to my attention. I watched it for the first time in a glorious old cinema, **Cine City** in Withington, Manchester. It was a run-down art décor flea pit that transported you back to the mid-'70s. On the night in question, the heating was off, and you could clearly see your breath. Some drunks were sat behind me and my friend, and one of them had vomited. Just at *that* ear sequence, the vomit arrived underneath our seats (having travelled forward down the raked concrete floor), and we were subjected to the world's first Smello-Rama experience, as the delightful stench drifted upwards from the steamy vomit lava flow (now THAAAT's a good name for a band!). Despite this, I will never forget that night as I genuinely knew that I had seen a watershed movie, and just couldn't wait to see anything Tarantino had to offer. To this date, I can still honestly say that he has never made a movie that I didn't like, and mostly *really* like. It is almost ritualistic to me now. Upon the approaching release date of a Tarantino flick, I beg, borrow, or steal a copy of the soundtrack, and by the time of release, I am ready to go. To be clear, though, I have always dreaded the moment when I am watching one of his movies only to find the magic has gone, and the party is over. Surely he has to make a stinker at some point? So is **The Hateful Eight** the stinker I have been dreading, or is the master at the top of his game?

Happily, it is a long way from being a stinker of any kind, but I did find this film simply not as enjoyable as **Django Unchained**, **Inglourious Basterds**, or **Kill Bill**. I can see why some moviegoers might be put off by the slow incendiary pacing and its whopping 167 minutes runtime. It's a lot to ask of the casual movie goer, but there is much to applaud within, and some perseverance is rewarded. It starts out in epic style with Ennio Morricone backing up the ominous snow-covered Wyoming vista of the 1870s. John Ruth and his prisoner immediately begin to meet up with the titular cast that all end up congregating at Minnie's Haberdashery in a blood-soaked tale of intrigue in which everyone has an agenda, and not everyone is exactly who they appear



At approaching 3hrs, the titular *Hateful Eight* slightly outstay their welcome...

to be. It's Agatha Christie through gore-tinted glasses, and yet it just felt a little weak to me, although it's hard to pinpoint any major failing.

It's of no shock that the cast of **The Hateful Eight** are excellent, with Tim Roth and Samuel L. Jackson both on top comedic form albeit within the confines of a fairly grim narrative. It is a pretty black comedy all things said and done. The story itself is also fairly solid, with just enough twists and turns to maintain interest. It most resembles **Reservoir Dogs**. A cast trapped together in a room, with various agendas, and flashbacks filling in the gaps as we edge towards the only real question – who will be the last man standing? It's a simple but effective setup, making **Reservoir Dogs** and **The Hateful Eight** extremely well suited to a stage production. All this and a score from Mr Morricone sounds almost too good to be true. So what's my problem with it?

I think it simply attempts to convey so much characterisation that the lengthy runtime was inevitable but coupled with such a slow-burning pace it feels *really* slow. You just end up feeling like it could have been trimmed down by half an hour, and with a faster pace felt more satisfying. Don't get me wrong, it is a clever movie that manages to convey a snapshot of post-Civil War America, with all of its polarised politics of a pious North, and a bitter South. It needed to explore all of this and the raw emotions of those that felt short-changed by the aftermath of this contentious period. It was never going to be a straightforward 90-minute spaghetti western pastiche. It just needed to be a little more entertaining, if

I'm honest, and I can't see this being to everyone's taste in the commercial sense of a movie like **Pulp Fiction**. The fact that the *roadshow* version is further extended by way of an intermission might just be pushing Tarantino's obsession with fetish cinema a little too far. The problem here is that **The Hateful Eight** simply feels drawn out and long-winded. Something I don't feel very often while watching his best work. It is a shame, as I enjoyed it but it wasn't as captivating or involving as it could have been.

I also felt it was a waste of the much-lauded 70mm format that had Tarantino waging war on Disney over their perceived hijacking of the L.A. Cinerama Drome for **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**. THE venue that poor old Quentin had his heart set on to showcase **The Hateful Eight** in all its 70mm glory. If you consider that the format is best employed for epic productions that benefitted by showing off their wide sweeping landscape shots, and impressive vistas. To me, it was made pointless half an hour in with the rest of the movie taking place in one room. I will always applaud the guy for championing quality cinema values, but it seemed an odd choice of movie to pick for 70mm.

The Hateful Eight is a good Tarantino movie, but it is sadly not amongst the classics. I hope he just goes for it one day soon and does the full-on western that he so obviously has always wanted to create. Then all this obsession over format and visuals could result in something really spectacular. +

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com
Twitter: @JordanMRoyce
and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT
on Fab Radio International
www.fabradiointernational.com
also available from iTunes as a Podcast



Tarantino takes on the Mouse House over a 70mm screening

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

STARBURST

SUBSCRIBE NOW

- Choose between coverline-free Collectors' Edition with original artwork cover or Newsstand
- Delivered to your door on the day of publication
- SAVE MONEY

GO DIGITAL
TODAY

Available on tablet devices



www.starburstmagazine.com/subscribe



STUDENTS
JUST £10
PER DAY!
WITH VALID STUDENT ID

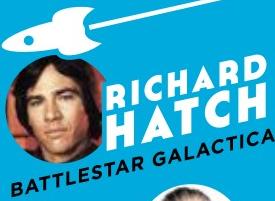
SATURDAY 9TH & SUNDAY 10TH APRIL 2016

AT THE SPA COMPLEX

ADULT WEEKEND TICKETS: £25 | ADULT DAY TICKETS: £15
CHILD DAY TICKETS: £5 (ages 5-16) STUDENT DISCOUNT: £10 (per day)

CHILDREN UNDER 5
GO FREE

GUESTS INCLUDE:



RICHARD HATCH
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA



GARRETT WANG
STAR TREK: VOYAGER



CLAUDIA CHRISTIAN
BABYLON 5



LARRY NEMECEK
STAR TREK GURU



JON CAMPING
HARRY POTTER



SIMON FISHER-BECKER
DOCTOR WHO | HARRY POTTER



DAN STARKEY
DOCTOR WHO



BARNABY EDWARDS
DOCTOR WHO



NORMAN LOVETT
RED DWARF



JOSEPHINE GILLAN
GAME OF THRONES
*appearing Sunday only



MILTOS YEROLEMOU*
GAME OF THRONES
*appearing Sunday only



LUKE BARNES
GAME OF THRONES
*appearing Sunday only



KEV CROSSLEY



GREG STAPLES

COMIC-ARTISTS:



GARY ERSKINE



DAVID HINE



RICHARD PIERS RAYNER

TO BOOK VISIT WWW.SCARBOROUGHSPA.CO.UK
WWW.SCIFISCARBOROUGH.CO.UK



@scifiscarbs /scifiscarborough
GUESTS SUBJECT TO CANCELLATION AT ANY TIME



The Spa
Sheffield International Venues



Oh we do like to geek
beside the seaside!

ROLE PLAY GAMING | CONSOLE GAMING | RETRO GAMING | PRO PHOTO SHOTS | KLINGONS | JUDGES | STARFLEET | TIMELORDS | DALEKS | ASTROMECH DROIDS
GUEST PANELS | GEEK PUB QUIZ | TRADING HALL | TABLETOP GAMING | LIVE MUSIC | COSPLAY COMPETITIONS
AUTHORS | AUTOGRAPHS | CHILDRENS' ENTERTAINMENT ZONE | MINECRAFT | COLLECTIBLE CARD GAMING
INDIE FILMS | ORIGINAL & REPLICA PROP DISPLAYS
AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...